JULY 35 Cents

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

31 CASH PRIZES

See contest story page 59

Erle Stanley Gardner

Charlotte Armstrong

Wade Miller

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STEVE ALLEN,
outstanding TV and radio emcee:

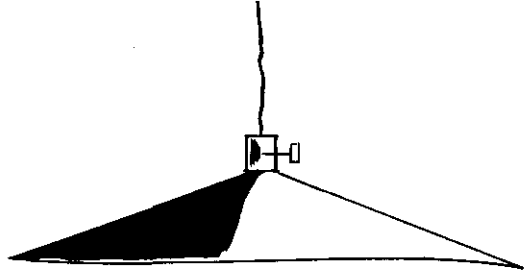
"Television keeps me so busy that I don't find much time to relax. When I do take time, ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE is a helpful relaxer. It has given me many hours of pleasure."

JOAN CRAWFORD,
Celebrated screen star:

"ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE is a must in our household. It has to be in a class all its own, because so many writers read it—and that's always a good test."

EDWIN B. WILSON,
Executive Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle:

"I used to be a Sherlock Holmes fan but I hadn't read a detective story for a long time until I got hold of a copy of EQMM. It clicked with me at once. I especially enjoy the mysteries written by noted authors of general fiction. The magazine is fine relaxation for people who work under high pressure."



It's fun to ***curl up***
with a good crook

. . . and you'll discover the very best crooks that murder can buy in the pages of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Of course, it won't be an exclusive discovery. Besides the notables to the left, EQMM is the favorite mystery magazine of such headliners as Christopher Morley, Helen Traubel, Ralph Bellamy, James Hilton and a host of others. In its pages they discover relaxation, excitement, escape. They read not only the best short stories by leading detective-story writers, but also little-known crime classics by the literary great in other fields. Thus mysteries by Ernest Hemingway and John Dickson Carr . . . by Somerset Maugham and Georges Simenon . . . by Edna St. Vincent Millay and Agatha Christie . . . appear side by side. No wonder such a rich and rare mixture has attracted so distinguished an audience. *As an EQMM fan*, you're in good company!

35¢

each month at your newsstand

$4 a year
by subscription

471 Park Avenue
New York 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

CONTEST STORY

MERLINI AND THE LIE DETECTOR — *Clayton Rawson* — 59

SUSPENSE STORY

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE? — *Charlotte Armstrong* — 3

DETECTIVE STORIES

BLACKMAILERS HAVE THEIR USES — *Edmund Crispin* — 41

THE MAN WITHOUT AN ENEMY — *John & Ward Hawkins* — 73

THE HAND IS QUICKER THAN THE EYE — *Erle Stanley Gardner* — 81

STORM WARNINGS — *Stewart Beach* — 115

CRIME STORIES

GIVE A MAN ROPE — *Stuart Cloete* — 23

MARKHEIM — *Robert Louis Stevenson* — 45

MAKE WESTING — *Jack London* — 66

INVITATION TO AN ACCIDENT — *Wade Miller* — 130

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

LIFE BEGINS AT 2:15 — *Willard Marsh* — 35

KILLERS THREE: THE LETTER — *Fredric Brown* — 65

EQMM "FIRST"

THE PEARLY GATES ARE OPEN — *Gladys Cluff* — 111

DETECTIVE DIRECTORY — *Robert P. Mills* — 128

The best of the new and the best of the old

PUBLISHER: *Joseph W. Ferman* **EDITOR:** *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 26, No. 1, Whole No. 140, JULY, 1955. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 471 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

Copyright, 1955, by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A.

ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor*
CHARLES ANGOFF, *Associate Editor*
GLORIA LEVITAS, *Assistant Editor*
GEORGE SALTER, *Art Director*
HOWARD K. PRUYN, *Production Manager*
CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Editorial Secretary*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EXCITING MYSTERY READING

THE CASE OF THE MISSING CORPSE

by Edwin Lanham

(*formerly "Death of a Corinthian"*) (Abridged Edition)

Everyone told Roy about Greg Matthews and his scandalous wife, Kay. But Roy still loved Kay, and in an effort to learn the truth about her, he agreed to go sailing with Greg. Unfortunately, both Greg and his beautiful yacht disappeared. And Roy was left holding a small slip of yellow paper that could cost him his life. ". . . entertaining," says the *New York Herald Tribune* **A BESTSELLER MYSTERY**

PAYOFF IN BLOOD

by Hal Jason Calin

(*formerly "Rocks and Ruin"*)

Private Eye, Ed Green, took a job from mob-king Vince Manessa only because it looked legitimate and he was hungry and desperate. But the simple Paris assignment boomeranged suddenly into a strange affair with a beautiful woman, a desperate flight from the cops, and a search for a little leather casket for which men would die — or kill. ". . . excellent," reports the *Saturday Review.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY

KILLER IN THE STRAW

by The Lockridges

(*formerly "Death and the Gentle Bull"*)

There was no doubt that the bull had killed Margaret Landcraft. But Captain Heimrich who knew a lot about people, was convinced that behind the animal was a darker, more dangerous beast; a human beast that would continue to kill until it achieved what it wanted. "One of the Lockridges' best," comments *Frances Crane* in the San Francisco *News.* **A MERCURY MYSTERY**

Top-Flight Stories in these Magazines, too

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Here are the best stories of practically all the modern masters, plus the little known mystery masterpieces of world-famous literary figures. Only Ellery Queen, owner of the world's finest library of crime fiction, could bring you such gems every month! 35¢ a copy. $4.00 a year.

The Magazine of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION

Here are outstanding stories, new and old, for people with imagination . . . sparkling tales of strange new worlds and peoples. F&SF is edited by famed author-editor Anthony Boucher. 35¢ a copy. By subscription, $4.00 a year. Published monthly.

Mercury Publications, 471 Park Avenue, N. Y.

MORE THAN 60 MILLION BOOKS AND MAGAZINES SOLD TO ENTHUSIASTIC READERS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

A new story by the brilliant author of THE UNSUSPECTED *and* MISCHIEF, *and more recently,* CATCH-AS-CATCH-CAN, THE BETTER TO EAT YOU, *and* THE DREAM WALKER . . . *We shall only say this about Charlotte Armstrong's prize-winning story: read the first paragraph, and if you can stop — or once started, if you can lay this story aside — well, go right ahead, and good luck to you! We found this story un-put-down-able . . .*

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

IF YOU WERE RIDING ALONG IN A bus and, through the window, saw a man who was supposed to have died a year ago, you would be startled, wouldn't you? But if you were, at that very moment, on your way to buy a wedding present for his widow . . . who was marrying the man you loved . . . so that your heart was breaking . . . *what would you have done?*

The man's name was Eddie McNaughton. It was my cousin Marcia who was getting married again — to John Lockhart. I had adored him since I was thirteen years old.

Right after my mother died, Aunt May took me to live with them. My cousin Marcia was then in her last year of high school, flying around on dates, thinking about college, seventeen years old. I was too young to be her bosom friend. It was the kind of household in which everyone goes about his own business. My Uncle Paul teaches English Literature and seems to live locked up in his own head. Aunt May, civic-minded to the saturation point, is a handsome, buxom figure in a tailored suit, giving orders and suggestions at the breakfast table; then she vanishes until dinnertime.

It wasn't that I lacked anything. I had clothes and food, and the doctor if I was sick. I had my teeth taken care of and my schooling planned out for me. I wasn't put upon: nobody was unkind. It was just that Uncle Paul never quite heard anything I said and Aunt May settled my problems along with each day's menus and then was gone. And my cousin Marcia never looked in my direction with those long green eyes as if she ever really saw anybody there.

I was all legs and eyes and I suppose I was shy. I suppose I would have fetched and carried and been Marcia's slave, if she had wanted to bother with me. She was just that much older

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and better poised, slim, with hair the color of wet sand, and a high-boned arrogant face, and she was so much more knowing in a female way. I stood in awe of her. But she didn't let me get a crush on her. Maybe she knew my childish devotion would be too easily come by, and that I could have been a nuisance. A thirteen-year-old tagalong is not what a girl needs, at seventeen. Anyhow, we lived in the same house and we never quarreled. We passed each other by. She would say, "Hi, Nan? How've you been? What's up?" Questions like that. But I could tell she never really wanted any answers.

John Lockhart was 26 the year I came to live next door. He was an orphan, too. I used to think of that. The lovely old white frame house, the old housekeeper, as well as the family business and quite a lot of money, had all been his inheritance. He was even then a widower. Alone, good-looking, a little quiet and sad, and with the nicest manners in the world. . . .

He rushed into the vacuum in my heart. There I was, lonely, skinny, knob-kneed, wide-eyed, always hanging around the yard. Somehow he started to teach me to play tennis. Sometimes I helped him do things. Once we built a brick wall. Then he'd give me tickets. Sometimes he'd take me along to a ball game or to the beach. He was neighborly with my Aunt and Uncle — often in and out of their house. I often thought he was lonely, too. Marcia had no time for him. She wrote him off, in those days, as a stuffy middle-aged widower. Anyhow, she went back east to school, so she wasn't around much. But all I needed was a pat on the head to behave like a puppy at his heels. He treated me as if I had been his kid sister.

I grew up adoring him. I never quite got into the boy-crazy state. All through college, even after my figure emerged and I learned to comb my hair, and my face got big enough to hold my eyes, I was insulated and apart from all others — because I adored only him.

I knew his young bride had died suddenly of some quickly devastating disease and I tiptoed in the presence of his sorrow. I could wait, I told myself. While his heart healed, I could grow.

For reasons of my own, then, I didn't want to go east to school; so I went to UCLA. I never got mixed up very much with campus affairs. I didn't mind. I was waiting with sweet suspense for John Lockhart to notice that I had grown up. He didn't seem to notice. He still took me to the beach now and then. He still — no matter what kind of bathing suit I wore — hunted for pebbles on the sand "with the little girl next door."

Well, by the time I finished school, Marcia was being a career girl, doing something for a fashion magazine in New York. Whenever she whirled home for a visit, which wasn't often, her clothes were astonishing and her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

air of amused impatience with all of us used to strike me dumber than ever.

But then Aunt May got it into her head that I was getting too narrow and provincial and decided to give me a cruise for a graduation present. But, oh, I didn't want to go too far or too long away from the center of my life. So I begged for a trip to New York instead. We had just about compromised on a visit to Marcia — Aunt May had written and I was preparing myself to bear it — when Marcia wired, like a bolt from the blue, that she was married.

Aunt May and Uncle Paul were first shocked and then bravely determined to be happy. Neither could get away to go to New York just then, and Marcia had no intention of bringing her new husband home. So when I went to New York I was a token of family solidarity and also a kind of spy.

But that's how I could recognize Eddie McNaughton. I had spent two weeks in his apartment. I knew him very well when I saw him standing on the sidewalk, one year after he had died.

That was a strange unhappy two weeks in New York. Eddie and Marcia lived in a brownstone, the like of which I'd never seen. To me, after California light and spaces, it was dark and unwholesome. And the sticky heat took all the starch out of me. Marcia had her job. She met my plane with "Hi, Nan. How've you been? How's the family?" After that she went right on with her daily routine.

So there I was. I slept on a couch in their living room. I slept, rose, dressed, ate. I might have been a stranger, a paying guest, or a mouse in the wall. After a day or two, I feebly tried to show myself the city, but I didn't know where to go or what to do. I didn't much care. I'd given up and was quietly suffering the time out, dreaming that John was missing me *terribly*, when Eddie McNaughton suddenly took notice.

Marcia's husband was a musician. He worked only sometimes, playing a piano by night. He came in and out of their bedroom most informally at any old hour, not minding me in my night clothes on the sofa. He was fair-haired and thin and rather weedy, as if he'd grown too fast, and he was pale. He wasn't as young as he seemed at first glance. I found out he was 30. It was the aura of instability about him that made him seem younger. He was very uneven, sometime languorous to the point of sloth, sometimes feverishly active. Oh, he was untidy, unorganized, scatter-brained . . . but he had charm.

At first he took his cue from Marcia and paid no particular attention to me beyond a well-wishing grin whenever I caught his eye. But one morning when Eddie, surprisingly, turned up at the breakfast table, he said, "Hey, Marcia, why don't we do something for your cousin Nan? What's she seen? What's she done?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What a stupid time she's having."

Marcia shrugged. "I've got a job, after all. How can I go sightseeing?"

"Okay," said Eddie. "But *I* can make like a cousin-in-law, can't I? Come on, Nan, I'll show you the town."

And he did — the best he could. Of course no day ever quite jelled. We wouldn't quite get where we had planned to go. Eddie was no tourist, anyhow. He had a way of dragging me past the sight we were supposed to be seeing, pouring a rapid patter into my ear that assumed I surely was not such a square as to wish to linger and look at that. We always ate in a Chinese restaurant. We usually ended up in a bar.

Eddie was not much of a drinker. It was just that nothing interested him for long and he often ran into people he knew. I sat in a lot of bars listening to Eddie talking with strange people who spoke a language I didn't quite understand. I suppose I was really naïve. But I just didn't know the words. I couldn't play whatever the game was.

Eddie would kid me about my eyelashes. He said I had "daisy eyes" — daisies with blue centers and stiff black petals all around. I think I amused him, yet I couldn't help liking Eddie — just for taking the trouble to tease me . . . even if I never understood him or his life or theirs together.

I saw swift passages of affection between them, lightning understanding. I'd hear guttural anger in their voices in the bedroom behind the door. I thought Marcia was on edge, and I supposed it wasn't easy to be working all day and carrying on this mysterious duel of passion and protest with Eddie at night. She seemed worn and thin and tense. As for Eddie, he was a creature of moods entirely. He seemed to live formlessly, but driven just the same.

Their whole regime was a rat race. I didn't understand it at all. But when Eddie put me on the plane to come home — his good impulse for that day — I said goodbye with real affection and I thanked him warmly. I remember Eddie's pale brown eyes, with that flicker of kindness and pity in them, as he patted me and said, "Aw, let it go, kid. It was kinda nice having you around, after all."

So. Marcia hadn't wanted me around and she must have said so to Eddie. I wasn't very much surprised. If I was twenty-one, why she was twenty-five and a woman — and I was still a tagalong.

I came home and reported. *I* liked Eddie but I knew Marcia's parents would never approve. But it was impossible to tell them the intangibles I felt. I tried not to make my report just a series of smooth falsehoods. Of course Uncle Paul didn't notice what I said. He kept repeating, "That's fine." Aunt May listened more carefully and caught some of my doubt. But when I stumbled on the word "adjustment" I saw her mind close. I felt as guilty as if I had told her a lie. I remember how

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I tried to talk to John about it. But of course he wouldn't let me. It wouldn't have been good manners for him to listen. He wouldn't gossip. He kept himself aloof from all that.

Eventually I got a job and it was all right. It wasn't very important to me. Actually I just kept on waiting, next door to John.

The next thing we knew, word came that Eddie was killed in a plane crash. Uncle Paul flew east and flew home again, vague as ever. A few weeks later, Marcia came home to stay. That was nearly a year ago.

I had tiptoed in the presence of John's sorrow. I thought I understood it. I broke my heart to understand. He went to Marcia as if only he could understand her sorrow. She was thin and haggard, as if she had just come out of a hospital. She was tragic and stunning. I might as well have been thirteen years old all over again.

Her green eyes saw John Lockhart and now she was 26 and tired and needing different things from those she had needed nearly ten years ago. So she saw John in his charming house, with his position, his wealth, his background, his manners.

I was frightened. I could see what was happening. One awful morning I tried to tell her that I was in love with him. My cousin's green eyes passed over my face. She chose to pretend I was only praising him. She never had bothered about me.

I guess she saw the security, the safety, the peace, there next door, after Eddie and the New York rat race. Besides, what could I do? *Maybe* she fell in love. *Maybe* all's fair. . . . I don't know. I simply watched her take him away from me, and it looked so easy. I watched John Lockhart fall in love with her. And then they were engaged and Aunt May told me. I must be in the wedding party, give them a present to show my love. But I put it off.

I knew I had to pull myself together. I had to buy a wedding gift and go gracefully through the wedding and somehow hide my anguish. I had to behave the best I could. I had to remember that John thought of me merely as a child. I had to realize that he always would. I had to count the years and understand that although I was twenty-two, he was 35, and there was a gap I would never close and my devotion would be, forever, only thirteen years old. But maybe you can understand how what was left of my heart hated my cousin Marcia, steadily and fiercely, no matter how I prayed to be better or stronger. . . .

Ten days before the wedding day, I got on that bus — me and the lead in my heart. I was thinking miserably of nothing at all when suddenly I saw Eddie McNaughton on the sidewalk, as alive as I am.

I cried out and beat the window glass with my hand. The motion caught his eye. He saw me and knew me and started to grin in his old familiar way. I pushed out of my seat, rang buzzers, stumbled to the door.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By the time I got out, the bus had carried me a block and a half away. I ran back. But he wasn't waiting anywhere. Oh, I asked people, described him, went into every shop. I searched desperately for him. I couldn't find him. Who remembers a man on a sidewalk?

If you were in my position, what would you have done?

I knew what I *had* to do. But the lead in my breast wasn't getting any lighter. I got a cab to go home but I was sure what was going to happen.

Marcia was in the library, writing thank-you notes. If I looked what I felt when I came in, I must have been the picture of calamity.

"What's the matter now?" she said with a delicate boredom and then put the tail of the pen in her mouth.

What could I do but simply tell her? "Eddie McNaughton is alive. I saw him on the street. He isn't dead."

It was just as if I had lit a match. The flat green eyes began to blaze.

"I was on the bus . . ." I began, and suddenly I was scared. "Marcia, *I* can't help it. I *saw* him!"

She had dropped the pen and stood up. "You rotten little liar!" she said viciously.

"I'm not lying. . ."

"Of course you're lying! What you say — it's *impossible!*"

"No, it's not impossible. Because the plane burned up and they couldn't identify. . ."

"You thought of that, didn't you?" she screamed. "You've been brooding around in corners, thinking this up, for days, for weeks. Of all the rotten evil things to do to me! Of course, you thought of it! Well, you're not going to get away with this. Everybody knows what's the matter with you. You're mad about John Lockhart and you're eating yourself up with jealousy. I told mother . . . I knew you'd make some sort of scene! But I must say I never expected anything like this!"

"I had to tell you," I said as quietly as I could. "I saw him. How could I let you go on if it's bigamy?"

"Bigamy!" she exploded. "How can you be so *wicked?* Eddie is dead, dead, dead! And you know it as well as I do. You're *lying!*"

Uncle Paul had heard the commotion and he put his head in. "Dad," cried Marcia, "she's telling the most monstrous lie!"

"I saw Eddie McNaughton on the sidewalk," I said, once more. "He isn't dead. I tried to find him and speak to him but I couldn't."

"Dear me," said Uncle Paul, his mild eyes filling with shock. "Oh, dear me, Nan, now how can you be so sure?" He didn't know what to do.

"She's inventing it," cried Marcia. "She's doing this to break up my wedding. You know she's off her head about John. You know she's been absolutely green. You know John and I have been so sorry for her."

My poor leaden heart was down to the carpet. "But Eddie was standing there on the sidewalk. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Perhaps," said Uncle Paul hopefully, "it was some kind of hallucination. . ."

I said feebly that I thought they ought to check. I could hardly stand up; I don't tell lies — I never have.

"Check!" Marcia was frantic. "There's nothing that can be checked and she knows it. A man standing on a sidewalk! What trace can there be? And John . . . oh, John. . . . What do you *want?*" she shrieked at me. "You want us to wait seven years? Is that it?"

I mumbled that I was sorry, but she kept flinging herself up and down the room. "You've got to stop her. You've got to get a doctor, Dad, and send her off somewhere. I never heard of anything so wicked and cruel! Don't let her tell that insane story to John. Why must *we* suffer because she's so jealous of me? She always has been."

"No," I said.

"You *are* a liar!"

"I wasn't always . . ." But I couldn't talk, not to her. I couldn't explain I had never minded her not bothering about me. I had never minded *anything* until she came home and broke my long dream and took John away.

Uncle Paul can tell you the slightest juicy whisper of gossip or intrigue that breathed in Elizabethan London. But angry voices in his own house and in his own century were too much for him. Aunt May came home and she took over. She told Marcia to be quiet, then began to grill me.

"You knew that Edward's body in that burning plane wreck was never fully identifiable?"

"Yes, Aunt May, I knew that." I was sitting down now, with my head hanging.

"Look at me, Nan. Is *that* why you say you saw him?"

"No. Of course it isn't. I *did* see him — at least, I honestly think so."

"Now, that's pious," said Marcia. "But look at those big round blue eyes. She's lying her head off."

Aunt May hushed her, impatiently. "Had you been dreaming of this, dear?" she asked me.

"Oh, no. Never."

"Come. Nan." I shrank at the prospect of Aunt May "understanding" me. "You may have been dreaming of some miracle that would give you John Lockhart. We all know how you feel. Now, come, dear, you're young and it has been a blow and young girls sometimes make up these fantasies."

"No," I said, weeping with humiliation, "No, I wasn't dreaming. I was trying to accept. . ."

"Don't believe *that*," said Marcia.

Aunt May didn't believe me. I could tell. "Now, Nan, you do resent Marcia's coming home, I'm afraid. You have been very much upset about her engagement to John. I think it's quite possible that you would like to have seen Edward alive. And I think it's possible you've convinced yourself that you did see him. But I wish you would realize . . . what a dreadful thing you are doing. I don't like to ask for grati-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tude, but I could point out that this is a poor return to your Uncle Paul and me. . ."

"I know it's a dreadful thing," I said, "but I'm only saying what I saw."

I don't think she really believed me at all. "We might," she said judiciously, "quietly ask the police to . . ."

"No!" cried Marcia. "No, no! You can't make this *public*. That's what she *wants*. Don't let her go around telling this! Don't let her tell the newspapers!"

"I said 'quietly,' Marcia." Aunt May was trying to be firm and sensible. "If we could find some way to prove to Nan that she was mistaken. . ."

"She doesn't need proof. She knows she's lying. Eddie is dead. The airline knows that. It's crazy to say he's still alive. It's cruel."

Aunt May looked out the window. "Hush, here's John. . ."

"Nan, if you don't take it back, right now . . . If you tell John this — this terrible lie. . ." I think my cousin Marcia was ready to strangle me.

"I've got to tell him," I said stubbornly. "Or *you've* got to tell him. Even if I were lying, he wouldn't forgive you . . . He'll have to know."

I stared my cousin Marcia down. I don't know how I did it — I felt as if I were dying. I knew I'd lost John forever. But how could I let him marry bigamously, by retracting or keeping still, no matter what they thought I was doing? What would you have done?

They put me out of the room and told John Lockhart themselves. They put it the way they wanted to put it. I couldn't do a thing about it. I thought I had been miserable on that bus. It was nothing to what I felt now, sitting alone in the corner of the green couch, the pariah of the world, while on the other side of the library door they were telling John Lockhart in their own way that I was a cruel, malicious liar.

John came out of the library alone. He looked white and strained. "Nan, please tell me about this." His voice was the same gentle monotone.

"Yes," I said, my heart sick.

When I was through stumbling once more through my wretched story, John said, "This is hard for me to say, Nan. We've been good friends." He was sitting with his back very straight, his feet together almost primly. "But now I think it is necessary for me to be very clear."

"Yes," I said, my heart even sicker.

"You must believe," he went on carefully, "that even if I lose Marcia, even if I can never marry her, I could not marry *you*. I don't and never can care for you that way, Nan. You must believe me."

"All right," I said. "I believe you."

"So, since it can't possibly do you any good . . ." he continued wanly.

"*You* think I'm lying?" I said, hurt worse than I had ever been hurt before. "*You* think I am so mean?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Don't you know it's because I love you. . .?"

"Nan, don't . . ." he said, wincing as if I were something no fastidious person could touch. "Please don't . . . don't say you love me. Love is being considerate, not giving pain." I couldn't speak at all. "Can't you say, now, that you were mistaken?"

"Why, John," I said dully. "I wish I could. I don't want to give you pain. You see, it's just that I really did see him. . ."

He stood up with a sigh. "You know I can't risk letting Marcia in for any . . . nastiness. You've put us all in agony," he said.

"Not *I*. Not *I*. Can't you see? *I'm* not doing it. A fact is doing it."

"Don't be too proud to admit you were . . . impulsive," he said with that same ghastly kindness. "We would understand, Nan. Please think about it." Then he left me.

Every shred of comfort in the world was gone from me. Oh, when people set out to "understand" a person, how terrible it can be!

They conferred a long time in the library and then, finally, Uncle Paul asked me to come in.

So I said to them all, quickly, before they could speak, what I had made up my mind to say. "I'll go away. I won't live here. I promise you, now, that I won't speak one word. There will never be anything in the newspapers. You can forget all about me . . . hate me . . . whatever you please. But don't think I'm just lying to hurt you."

Aunt May said briskly, "We've come to the only sensible decision. Frankly, Nan, we don't think you saw Edward McNaughton. We think you are probably self-deluded. And we do understand how difficult it is to back down. But we must protect ourselves. John is going to hire a private detective to hunt for proof of Edward's death. If he can find it, then nothing you can do or say will hurt anyone."

"I think that is the best thing to do," I said, not looking at them, looking at the wall behind them.

A detective came the next morning. He was a youngish man, homely and red-headed. His name was Benjamin Brown. He listened to Aunt May while she stated the situation, and Uncle Paul nodded and agreed. He listened to Marcia tell him in a sad, cold tone exactly what they all thought of me. He listened to John Lockhart say that I had long been childishly attached to him and if in any way it was his fault, he was sorry. He had merely been kind, he said, as any well-bred person would have been. Oh, it was painful . . .

But Mr. Brown was businesslike. He got the names and addresses he would need. "I wonder if you've given any thought to the implications. First, if Eddie McNaughton didn't die on that plane, who did? Second, if Eddie McNaughton is alive, why doesn't he say so? Anyone have any ideas?" He was looking at me.

Aunt May snorted. Marcia put

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her handkerchief to her eyes and moaned, "You see how crazy. . .?"

John said stiffly, "No man would do such a thing to his wife."

But Mr. Brown kept watching me.

I said, "No, I don't have any ideas. I don't understand it—I just saw him."

Mr. Brown asked if he could talk to me alone. The rest of them went away hopefully, I thought, as if they supposed I might confess my sin to a stranger.

"You knew McNaughton by sight pretty well?" the stranger asked, with no comment in his voice, no judgment of me.

I told him about my visit to New York.

"So," he said quickly, "you didn't think your cousin Marcia was particularly cordial?"

I explained about Marcia.

"You say you didn't resent all this? All those years she paid no attention to you?" Still no comment in his voice, still the plain, flat questions.

"I don't think so," I said earnestly. "It seems to me that I got used to it before I was old enough to resent it. It never occurred to me, Mr. Brown, that I had any 'rights.' Doesn't 'resent' mean that you feel you've been cheated out of your rights? I never thought there was any law she *had* to like me—so I simply got used to it."

He was listening thoughtfully.

"Maybe subconsciously," I said, "there was resentment all those years . . . but I didn't know it."

"You don't hate her—not at all?"

I had to go on, honestly. "Yes, I do. I hate her now. I was in love with John since I can remember and I told her so and she paid no attention . . . Oh, I'm perfectly conscious that I hate her now."

He looked away and rustled some papers. I guess he was embarrassed. "You're absolutely sure about this, in your own mind, Miss Brewster? You did see Eddie McNaughton?"

"Well," I said, "as sure as I *can* be. He recognized me, too."

"How do you know?" Mr. Brown sat up higher.

"Why, he just . . . you know . . . lit up and started to smile."

He was shaking his head. "I hope you're not basing your conviction on that reaction."

"But . . . if I know him, he knows *me*."

"Suppose you're in a public place," said Mr. Brown in a musing way. "Somebody stirs. You notice. You look around. This person is waving and making faces at you. Right away you say to yourself, Ah, somebody I know. And before you are quite sure who it is . . . don't you assume that if he knows you, you must know him? Don't you begin to respond?"

"That's so," I sighed. "Of course, that's so. Mr. Brown, I suppose I could have been mistaken. But I still think it *was* Eddie. It certainly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked exactly like him and he smiled his kind of smile. I *believe* it was Eddie, Mr. Brown."

"You saw him clearly?"

"Oh, yes. Full face. Of course if he has a twin or a double, that would explain it, too."

Mr. Brown chewed on his lips, looking at me thoughtfully. "So it would," he said in a few moments. "Well, I better get going."

"Whatever can you *do?*" I asked.

"The best solution would be to find some unimpeachable evidence that he *was* on the plane. Otherwise we may be balancing probabilities . . ."

"I told you that I hate her," I said, "and that's true. But I'm not just telling a plain lie, Mr. Brown. I couldn't have thought of such a bad one. I'm not that clever."

He said lightly, "When you come right down to it, it's not very clever to call anyone a plain liar. Because you think *you* know exactly what's in his mind. People jump to conclusions too fast. Always figure somebody else is simple . . . plain black or plain white . . . I try not to do that, Miss Brewster."

"Thank you," I said uncertainly.

"Listen," he said suddenly, "if it's any help to you, I believe that you *believe* you saw him. And if you do, why there wasn't anything else for you to do but say so." I began to cry. "Excuse me," he said, "I shouldn't make remarks like that. It's not professional. I hope I can settle the thing," he added rather wistfully and went away.

During the next dreadful week I found myself leaning on what he had said. It was all I had to hold me up. I went to work every day, but I doubt if I was much help at the office. I came home just to sleep at night. Aunt May spoke to me now and then to make sure I was fed. I could feel Marcia's hostility in the house like a time bomb. I didn't see Uncle Paul. I took care not to see John Lockhart because I couldn't have borne it.

Nothing, so far as I knew, had been done about changing the wedding plans. It was supposed to take place quietly at home on Monday afternoon. I was so mangled and torn, I didn't seem to care. I would have moved away, but Aunt May wouldn't let me. So we all waited for Ben Brown to come back, and he did, on Saturday morning.

He phoned and we were waiting in the library. He looked tired. He tried to say something to ease our tension. "I wish I could tell you people right now, yes or no. All I can say is that I *may* have something helpful."

Marcia whimpered and turned her face, which was as haunted as mine, into John's shoulder.

Ben Brown had with him a fat brief-case and now, while he talked, he began to take little tissue-wrapped packages out of it.

"There's no doubt someone got on the plane with McNaughton's ticket and reservation. The question is, was it really McNaughton? I had no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

luck with witnesses — turned up nobody who could swear that he saw McNaughton at the airport that day. For that matter, unless it was a friend of his who actually talked with him, such a witness would be less than perfect proof, now, a whole year later. I even took a crack at the idea of identifying some missing person. But New York's a big place and too many people get missing, every day. So no luck — no proof there. Now from the other end: the job of identifying the body is a real tough one."

He threw a sheet of paper on the table. "There is the list, with twenty-eight names on it. If it were possible to get permission to exhume twenty-eight bodies and x-ray them all. . . ." A shudder passed over all of us. . . "Even then, since I can't locate a dentist or even a doctor who ever worked on or examined McNaughton, it looks like a totally futile procedure."

Now he had five little paper-wrapped packages out on the library table. He leaned on his palms. "One more thing I'd like to mention — something that I turned up in New York. I'm afraid there's a possibility that McNaughton was mixed up with some unscrupulous people. He was more or less involved with a racing crowd, and not an honest one, either. Gambling on the wrong side of the law and some fleecing of innocents." His voice got louder. "You may have known this, Mrs. McNaughton?"

Marcia said quickly in a high bitter voice, "I'll confess I'm not surprised." She held her head high. "You must know I'd broken away from him." Ben Brown's lids lowered as if they nodded.

John Lockhart said icily, "Marcia had left this man. They had separated. She had decided to divorce him, some time before this fatal plane trip."

Ben Brown said, "Yes, I knew she'd broken it off." His voice was gentle. "Maybe she knows no more than I do about what was troubling him. His reservations, you know, went through to Havana. The point I'm making is this: within this shadowy area there could be a reason for McNaughton to seize an opportunity to disappear, and if he *is* alive, not to want it known."

"Without even communicating with his wife?" said John haughtily.

"They were estranged. . ."

"Letting her run the risk of a bigamous marriage?" cried Aunt May, with her handsome nose in the air. "That's contemptible!"

Ben Brown licked his upper lip. "If a man is on the criminal fringe," he said, "and involved in debts, for instance, to people who collect rather violently . . . and perhaps in danger of his life . . . why, under those circumstances he's not subject to the same principles of conduct as . . ."

"It would be like Eddie," I interrupted. "If you knew him . . . Why, he'd just think that what people didn't know wouldn't count. If people wanted to think he was dead, and it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was convenient, he *might* just let it go at that. He'd mean no harm. He . . . well, he was like that."

Marcia was white. "I left Eddie because of certain things about him," she said, sounding prim and stiff, "but I can't believe he'd do this to me."

Ben Brown said, "I don't put much faith in this kind of guessing. But it does make a shade of difference when we come to balancing probabilities . . . if we see that he might have a good reason for hiding."

"Nonsense," said Aunt May grimly.

"What does it matter?" cried Marcia. "When he is dead."

Ben Brown said, "He is thought to be dead, all right. He is dead to his friends — and to his enemies. I went to the scene of the crash. It's not far from a small country town. Well, you know how kids are and, as I had imagined, the kids had been poking around the wreckage of that plane. I advertised that I'd pay good prices for any relics they might have turned up . . . if they could convince me they were genuine. Here I have the somewhat meager results. But that's why I came back. I realize that you are anxious, that time is short, and it would seem cruel," he lingered on the word, "to force a postponement of this wedding if there is any chance there's no real impediment . . ."

My cousin Marcia was not breathing at all. She hung forward, watching his face. We all did.

". . . no real impediment," he repeated. "It is just possible I have something here that belonged to McNaughton." Out of the first package he took a metal belt buckle. "I better mention that this buckle is monogrammed HY."

"What about it?" John's voice snapped with his nerves.

"If you'll check that passenger list, you'll find there was no one on it with those initials. Not proof, of course, that an improperly listed person was aboard." He turned around to me. "Is it, Miss Brewster?" It was just as if he challenged me to be fair.

"No," I said slowly, "it isn't proof. Someone could have borrowed a belt. Or the kids in that town could have fooled you. I don't see that you'll get any *proof* unless you find Eddie alive."

"We won't do that," said Marcia, "because he's dead. May I see what else is there?"

The detective unwrapped a tiny thing: it looked like a cuff link. Then he unwrapped a small pocketknife. The fourth package held a metal money clip shaped something like a letter of the alphabet. Last there was a ring with a cracked stone.

We sat in the soft light of the comfortable library and on the polished table the relics were tiny and cold, from that wild distant hill.

Marcia said, "Let me see that." Her finger pointed and Mr. Brown handed her the money clip. She rubbed it in her hand. The device, we could now see, was the treble-clef sign. "That's *his!* That's *Eddie's!*" She dropped it on the table with a clatter and hid her face.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ah, darling," said John Lockhart, "then it's all right. It's all right."

"Do *you* recognize it?" Ben Brown said to me.

I shook my head. "That doesn't prove anything," I said. "I mightn't have seen it, or he mightn't have had it when I was there." No one but Ben seemed to hear me.

John's face was shining with relief. "Thank you, Brown. Thanks very much. A fine job. A good job."

"Then you're satisfied? You don't want me to continue?"

"No need," John said, holding Marcia in his arms. "It's a moral certainty. *I* need no more."

"That's fine," said Uncle Paul.

Aunt May said, "I'm very glad it's settled." And then they all looked at me.

I opened my mouth, then closed it again. No one had tried to find a *living* Eddie. Maybe that was impossible. I opened my mouth again — I had a question to ask but I didn't ask it. Everyone was watching me.

Then Marcia said, angrily, "Don't sit there trying to think up something else, Nan. I'll never listen to you again. Mother, I can't have her at the wedding. I won't risk it. I just couldn't bear it."

"Oh, no," I said quickly. "I couldn't, either. I won't come. I'm very sorry for — for everything."

"Now that you've been proved wrong," John said appealingly, "please, Nan, won't you admit you weren't really sure?"

I looked at him, at his smile, the smile that was simply an arrangement of flesh on his face, as easy as always saying "Please" and "Thank you." I looked across chasms and acres of separation. "Human beings make mistakes," I said.

"Thank you, Nan." The smile was his way of "understanding" me. I looked away.

"I've found a one-room apartment near the office," I said loudly. "I'm all packed. So I think I'll just go, now. I hope," I said into the air, "that you'll all be very happy."

"Couldn't I drive you?" said Ben Brown. "I have a car and it looks as if I'm free."

"What's a moral certainty?" I said crossly and bitterly to Ben Brown. "What did he thank me for? What did I say but that I'm not infallible?"

"True for you, you're not," he said cheerily.

"Oh, I was probably mistaken," I said edgily.

"The chances always were," he said in that light way.

"There's only one question . . ." I knew I could ask *him*.

I saw his hands tighten on the wheel. "Go ahead."

"You did get a list of the missing persons — the ones who were actually missing the day of the crash?"

"I did." His answer was like a sigh.

"Did you check their initials?"

"Oh, there was a man named Harry Young, all right," he said. I couldn't speak. "Still missing, too. Want me to take that belt buckle and ask

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Young's wife if it's his? And if so, then will we decide the person listed as Eddie McNaughton was really Harry Young?"

"No," I said hopelessly. "It wouldn't prove a thing. No matter who else was on that plane, *Eddie* was there. *She* says so. And nobody doubts *her* and nobody thinks *she's* hysterical and nobody sees that *she's* got a big fat motive to tell a lie."

"Why don't you bawl a little bit?" he suggested pleasantly.

I read about the wedding in the paper.

I didn't live with the family any more. My little apartment wasn't bad and I went on working, as usual. Ben Brown took to dropping in. One day he told me he had quit his job and was going in for business management. He said he had decided detective work was not for him. Why not, I wanted to know. He said he couldn't achieve the professional attitude. He said it depressed him to try.

One night he asked me why I always made him take me to a Chinese restaurant. "It's coming out of my ears," he said. "Frankly, Nan, if I never smell another Egg Foo Yung, I think I'll live longer."

"Eddie McNaughton was mad about Chinese food," I said.

"Soooooo . . ." Ben whistled.

"Well, I'm human, Ben. They said I was either hysterical or a wicked liar and they 'understood' me all over the place. But nobody even imagined I might just be truthful . . . no one but you. It still hurts. I just wonder . . ."

"You think in one million years you can happen to go to the right Chinese restaurant at the right hour, even if he's still anywhere near Los Angeles?"

"No," I said stiffly. "Probability is certainly against it."

"Wait a minute. You always want to know if there's music."

"And there rarely is," I said, "so that narrows them down. Oh, I know it's foolish. But Eddie was a musician and it seems to me that his habits and his tastes and his skills are facts. If . . ."

Ben said, "You know I poked about, Nan. I didn't neglect any regular channel. His name is no help, since he wouldn't be using it. His description isn't striking . . ."

"He had a habit," I said, "of turning his lower lip inside out."

"Shall I tell you what I think, Nan? I wish to God you'd forget all about it. Honey, John Lockhart is married and gone. Can't you get him out of your mind?"

"It's not that I love him so much," I said, flippantly, "but that I hate her more." I could say things like this to Ben, somehow.

"Then," said Ben, very cool and matter of fact, "you think she was deliberately lying about that money clip?"

"Oh," I said, stung, realizing what he was pointing out to me, "no, no, I don't *think*. I don't say she *must* have been lying. The clip might have been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eddie's. Or she might have been so upset she made a mistake." It was no good. I began to cry, helplessly. "All right. I *do* think she'd lie. She'd be smart enough. Oh, I don't know . . . I just don't know."

Ben said, "Nan, it's poison. Let it go."

"Eddie used to say that," I sobbed. " 'Let it go, kid.' "

"Honey, I say it too. Let the hatred go."

I must have asked with a look, How can I?

"So maybe you can love somebody else some day," he said.

"I . . . try. But oh, Ben, it isn't easy."

"I didn't say it was easy. I said it was advisable. And you've got good sense, Nan, and you *are* fair-minded." I looked at him. "And with your eyelashes wet you're a sight to behold," he said in a fluster, "and God forbid I should try to 'understand' you. So I'll tell you right now, I think your cousin Marcia behaved like a perfect louse to you and if you're *mad*, I don't care. But don't hate her, Nan. It's not your style." He looked so indignantly human, somehow, I had to laugh.

But after that we didn't talk about Eddie, alive or dead, any more. We got to be good friends. Ben was nice to have around.

When I finally got a telephone, Aunt May called up one day. "Nan, how are you, dear? Will you listen to me?"

I said, of course I would.

"I think this silly feuding has gone on long enough. I want it stopped. Will you . . . now, don't say 'no' too quickly . . . will you come here some evening and meet Marcia and John and let us all be together, as a family should?"

"Oh, Aunt May . . ." My heart spiraled down.

"Bring a young man," she said shrewdly. "Please, Nan. Look ahead, not back. And let us be a normal family again."

"Does Marcia want this to happen?"

"*I* want it to happen." Aunt May said firmly.

"Well, I don't know . . ."

"Call me," she urged, and I promised that much.

Ben thought I should go. He said he would go with me. "I'm the young man, I hope. Besides, I prescribe this."

"To get the hate out? Is this the way?"

"See them," he urged. "I'll bet you something."

"What?"

"They won't look the same."

"I don't know what you mean," I said.

"Well, you're not the same, for one thing. And listen to me, Nan, while I try to show you a different picture. Your cousin Marcia lived a life in New York that you called a rat race. Did it ever occur to you how far she has pulled herself away from that?"

"Of course. Money, security, a solid citizen for a husband."

"Well, just because you wanted the same thing and she got it, don't sneer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stop and think. Marcia, herself, could have been way off the track . . ."

"Mixed up in gambling?" My eyes popped.

"Well," he said uncomfortably. "You say she looked ill and tired. What if . . . now let me talk a minute! . . . here's a lively girl, rebellious and a bit reckless, on her own, and she gets spinning in bad circles. She falls in love with this weak charmer and she's got a struggle on her hands. Suppose your cousin saw she was headed toward a bad fall? In the rackety insecurity, in that rat race, as you called it. Toward . . . well, say, dishonesty and trouble and . . . maybe even worse. Now suppose she broke it off, Nan, and painfully — God knows how painfully — then dragged herself back, reaching for some dignity again . . ."

"And for the man I loved," I muttered.

"Yeah. You loved him. You had a clear field for years. Did he fall for you? What did she take that was yours — really yours?"

"Do you *know* she was mixed up with gamblers and that kind of thing?" I gasped.

"No. I don't know a damn thing. I'm putting a hypothetical case. I'm trying to get *you* out of a dead end. Look at it as if you didn't, for God's sake, know all there is to know about *her* motives and *her* pressures. Try giving another human being the benefit of the doubt, why don't you? Concede it's possible for people to change and that there is such a thing as putting your past behind you — and then give her a little credit for pulling herself out of that mess."

I couldn't say a thing.

"Oh, go on," said Ben warmly, "make that date, Nan. Go and see them. She's on committees, your cousin Marcia. She does good works. Charity and all that. She's taking right after your Aunt May."

"You have too much charity for me," I said flatly. "I don't think I can do it."

"You might see a different person."

"I'll see John," I choked.

"Is he? . . . You mean you still. . . . ? That twerp? Well, what the hell am I hanging around. . . ."

"I'll go," I said quickly, "if you'll help me."

Ben began to grin. "Sure. It's going to do them good to see what a slave am I to your charms. It's going to show them you're getting along fine."

He made me laugh at myself. He was good at that. I made the date for the coming Friday. But when Ben came to fetch me he found me all upset. "I can't do it," I told him. "I just can't go. I'll behave in some stupid way . . ."

"No, you won't," he said firmly.

"I just cringe, Ben, when I think of seeing Marcia and John. How can I go?"

He said, and his face was grim. "I see we'll have to have a showdown."

"What?"

"For one thing — and get this straight, Nan — I'm not going to hang around any longer without get-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ting your full attention. I'm telling you. I want this cleared up one way or the other. So we'll have a showdown, shall we?"

"What do you mean?" I had never seen Ben's face like this.

"I mean I'm going to take you to a certain place for a cocktail and some Chinese hors d'oeuvres."

"Where?"

"Where there's a piano player."

"Oh!"

"Non-union. Doing a single, he doesn't have to be union. But Eddie McNaughton wouldn't be union — not with a phony name, and in hiding. So it narrows. I thought it was foolishness, too, until I turned up this one."

"Do you think . . . ?"

"I dunno," he said. "But he turns his lower lip out the way you said. Better come along and see."

It was an unusual Chinese restaurant, with soft lighting and lush decorations. We came in quietly and Ben winked at a waiter who took us to a table as close as you could get to the piano in the corner. The man sitting on the bench had his back to us. He didn't look around as we slipped into the booth not two yards away.

Ben nodded to me. I knew he would be listening. I got up and leaned over. "Hi, Eddie," I said, as casually as I could.

"You must be taking me for somebody else, Miss." His glance barely flicked at me. He was going to brush me off.

"Maybe it doesn't mean much to you," I said slowly, "but I cried when I heard you were dead."

He swallowed. He said in a different voice, still not looking up, "What do you want with me, Nan?"

"Nothing. Just to know." I hung onto the piano with one hand.

"Well, there was a fellow in a bigger hurry than I was that night." Eddie said. "So I sold him my seat and he took the plane. That's about it."

"Eddie, you don't want people to . . . find you?"

He let his wrists fall and he looked at me, a little angry, a little sad. "I bet you never got in a dangerous mess in your life. Listen, kid, let it go. I've got a deal. I'm going south again soon."

"South?"

"South of the border, let's say. You don't have to know where. No speaka da English any more. So be a good kid and let it go, huh?" His brown eyes were pleading.

I said slowly, "I was on a bus one day . . ."

"I know. I shouldn't have been on the street. But waiting was driving me nuts. How come you're here?" He turned to look behind him. Ben sat like a rock and seemed uninterested and unconnected with me.

"Because I . . . because . . ." I was afraid Eddie would jump up and run away. I groped for the right thing to say. "There's only one thing, Eddie . . ."

"The Law don't want me," he said quickly. "It's not that, Nan. Honest. Don't let it get around, please. There's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some people that . . . well, I'd rather keep out of their way. People with nasty ideas, let's say. I'm going south for keeps this time. Don't stop me."

"I wouldn't stop you, Eddie. It's only . . . well, it's because of Marcia."

He let his eyelids down. "Marcia and me were busting up. She don't care if I'm alive or dead." He peered at a sheet of music. "So don't worry . . ."

"But does she know you're alive?"

"Marcia? No . . . Not unless you told her," he said.

"She wouldn't believe me."

"Just as well," he murmured. "Aw, let it go, Nan. I *wish* you'd do that." He lifted his hands, ready to play. They shook with impatience. "You can make me trouble if you want to."

"She got *married*, Eddie," I said desperately.

He swallowed again. I saw the commotion in his throat. "Yeah, I read it in the paper."

"Eddie, she *can't* be married."

"I'll never cause her any trouble," he whispered.

"Oh, Eddie . . . don't you see there's another person? Her new husband. *He's* involved."

"All right." he said. "Listen, kid. It's legal."

"What?"

He looked up at me. His eyes were, as I had remembered them, a little pitying and a little kind. "When Marcia's folks wrote you were coming, we had to sort of put it around that we were married . . . well, Marcia was always after me to get married. Maybe she thought telling it around would put the pressure on me."

"You . . . you and Marcia were never married?" I hung onto the piano. "Is that what you're saying?"

"She's married, now. Just let it go, huh? This Eddie, poor slob, he wasn't the marrying kind. But he's long dead . . ."

He bent over the keys and I looked down on the top of his head. "This Eddie was nice to me once," I said.

A Chinese was staring at us suspiciously. "Excuse me, kid?" Eddie rocked erect. "I got to eat while I'm waiting, so I better get to work." His eyes asked me what I was going to do.

"Goodbye," I said to him helplessly. "I mistook you for someone else."

Music rippled out under Eddie's hands.

I went to the table and picked up my bag. Ben rose silently and was close behind me as we left the place.

But there I had it — with a witness, too. The power to cut my cousin Marcia down. Because I knew — and the vision was blinding bright — that of all men in the world, John Lockhart . . . rigid, snobbish, so very proper . . . would never be the man to accept such a situation.

"Did you *know* this?" I asked Ben. "Did you find this out in New York, Ben?" He wouldn't answer. We got into his car. "What shall we do?" I begged him. "Oh, what shall we do?"

"You do it," he said harshly. "I'll back you up, whatever you do or say."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He started the car. It took us nearer to the house where my Aunt May, my Uncle Paul, John Lockhart and his legal wife, my cousin Marcia, would be waiting.

"I wouldn't want to tell where Eddie is," I blurted. "I wouldn't want to put him in danger. I wouldn't have to." Ben didn't speak. "If I tell them I talked to him and you say you heard us, then they'll have to believe he's still alive. Won't they?"

He didn't answer.

"Shouldn't I tell them? Ben, help me!"

He said, "No. I won't help you, Nan. I've told you. This is a showdown."

"Please take me home," I said nervously. "Let's not go there tonight."

He didn't answer, but he didn't change the direction in which we were going.

I knew I could destroy my cousin Marcia. And hurt them all. John Lockhart, who hadn't fallen in love with me, and my Aunt May who was always so busy, and my Uncle Paul who never heard what I said. If I vindicated myself by showing them that I'd been truthful all along . . . oh, it would destroy Marcia all right!

And it would only be telling the truth, once more.

But Marcia thought Eddie was dead. She thought the past was dead and behind her. But I could take her off those committees, I could cut her down. . . .

I looked at Ben's face. He wouldn't help me . . . any more than he had already.

What would you have done?

Note:

If you enjoy ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE you will like some of the other MERCURY PUBLICATIONS:

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION
MERCURY MYSTERY BOOKS
BESTSELLER MYSTERY BOOKS
JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY BOOKS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Although Stuart Cloete is of Dutch origin, although he was born in Paris and educated in England, his home, spiritually and otherwise, is Africa. History records that an ancestor, Jacob Cloete, landed at Table Bay in 1652 and was given the first land grant ever made to a white man at the Cape of Good Hope; and that another ancestor was Chief Justice of South Africa and the first High Commissioner of Natal.

Actually, Stuart Cloete came to the land of his Boer forefathers the hard way. In World War I he served with the Coldstream Guards and was severely wounded. To regain his health he went to South Africa, and for fifteen years operated a cattle ranch, then a dairy farm, near Johannesburg. The cattle ranch was a mere 16,000 acres, but despite its vastness it brought Mr. Cloete close to the land and people of South Africa, close to their hearts.

In 1933 he determined to write — about his home and the strange history and customs of its people. He sold his cattle and returned to England. In the first year of writing he sold exactly nothing; the second year he earned eight guineas; the third year, the magnificent sum of 36 guineas. But he persevered, and in 1937 produced THE TURNING WHEELS *which became an immediate success — a Book-of-the-Month selection in the United States and a Book Society choice in England. Since then have come such fine books as* CONGO SONG, WATCH FOR THE DAWN, *and more recently,* THE CURVE AND THE TUSK.

Now we offer you a short story by Stuart Cloete — a warm, human tale of the place in the world that Mr. Cloete loves best, South Africa. You will find the characters interesting and "different," and their speech most appealing; and you will meet in Jan Smit as wily a "spreading oak" as ever baited a trap to avenge a swindler — and "kill two birds with one stone."

GIVE A MAN ROPE

by STUART CLOETE

WHEN A WOMAN GOES TO LIVE with a man, there's talk. So when Nella came to live with old Smitty, there was plenty said by the old wives in the dorp. "His niece, indeed," they said, "a pretty girl like that —" as if a man never had a pretty niece before.

The one who talked the most was the Widow Coetzee. She was famous

Copyright, 1951, by Stuart Cloete; originally appeared in "Collier's"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for talking and was said to have had designs on Big Jan ever since his wife had died five years ago. Her remarks were discounted in the dorp because everyone knew of her feeling for Smitty, and nowhere in the world is a jealous woman of fifty-odd expected to have much good to say of a pretty girl of seventeen.

The talk never worried Jan Smit. He was glad to have Nella with him, even though he was sorry for the cause of it — her being left an orphan when his brother died, and penniless too, owing to the tricks of a *slim* lawyer who had swindled her father in a most respectable and legal manner. Of course, Nella would get Sterkfontein when Smitty died, and while he lived he'd take care of her and try to get her a good husband. But supposing she had not had a fine uncle like him?

This was in his mind as they drove into the dorp. The dorp always made him think of it, for it was in villages and towns that the spiders wove their tempting webs. He looked at the girl beside him in the Cape cart. She was a pretty thing — golden, like a Jersey heifer, if there was such a thing as a blue-eyed Jersey. It was a pleasure to have her around.

He looked at a white board hanging outside one of the houses. It was a new board with some writing on it in black. He was against new things, against changes. Few of them were ever for the better.

Nella gripped his arm. "Stop," she said. Then she said, "Don't stop."

He tightened the reins and said, "Shall I stop or go on?"

"Go on. Please go on and then drive round again slowly."

"Why?" he asked. "We've got a lot to do. I don't want to waste time."

"Please," she said.

He let the horses trot, turned right and drove round, past the backs of the houses that lined the street, and up it again.

"Slow," Nella said, "slow."

He checked the blacks while she stared at the new sign. "It's him," she said. "Oh, Uncle, it's him."

"What's him?" he said.

"It's Jarrold, the lawyer," she said. "He's the man that killed Pa, pressing him, always pressing him."

"And now he's here," Smitty said.

"He couldn't stay there," Nella said. "He'd done too much."

"The hand of the Lord is in this," Smitty said. "*Ja*, here I clearly see the hand of the Lord. The Lord has delivered him to me like the head of John the Baptist on a platter." He closed his hand into a great gnarled fist. "Often," he said, "I've thought I should go after him. It was often in my heart to go and seek him out, but does not the Lord say, 'Vengeance is mine?' And who am I to go against the Holy Word? But now the Lord has sent him to me. Now I am the Lord's instrument."

"What will you do, Uncle?" The girl looked up into his face with blue saucer eyes.

"I shall a plan make. A plan by which he will destroy himself. Give a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man rope, I always say, and he'll hang himself." Then he said, "Did he ever see you, Nella?"

"No, he never saw me."

"And your name was not on any of the papers?"

"No."

"A plan," he said, "is made in three parts. It is made of the planner — that is me; the enemy — that is him; and the trap. It is the trap we must think of."

"*Ja*," she said.

"Now, with this kind of man, there is only one sort of bait to use. We will catch him with gold."

"But we have no gold, Uncle."

"No, we have no gold, but we will make some." He laughed. "We will make gold and set the trap. Now we must go to the store and buy what we need; then we will make our plan. Tomorrow is also a day, my young maid, and a good plan is not made in a moment. Get out, girl, and do not worry — your father will be avenged. Two things are very good," he said.

"Two things?"

"*Ja*. First, that he never saw you."

"No, he never saw me. When he came to the farm I always hid. I was young, and I did not like strangers."

"*Ja!*" he said. "That is good. And the other thing is that the name of Smit is common. There are a thousand Smits."

By the next morning the plan had begun to take form. Smitty put on his best suit, a dark one, and his top hat with the wide crêpe band he had worn since the death of his wife.

When Nella asked him why he wore his top hat, he told her it was part of the plan. "A man's hat," he said, "declares his intentions, and this" — he touched his brim — "is my funeral hat. It is also my wedding hat and my baptismal hat. It is the hat that I wear on important occasions." Leaving her to think these remarks over, he mounted his horse and rode to town.

He went to call on *Mevrou* Coetzee. She was a fine figure of a woman and sympathetic to him. The widow welcomed him and gave him coffee. He sat on the edge of his chair.

"*Mevrou*," he said, "I have come to you for help."

"*Ja*," she said, "I am a woman who is always ready to help a fine-looking man." She smiled at him.

"When I was young, I was a fine man," he said. "I was as strong as a bull."

"You are still a fine man, Jan Smit," she said. "You are like a great spreading oak."

He said, "That is well spoken because I am not easy to cut down. And you, *Mevrou*, are like wine."

"Like wine?"

"You go to a man's head, and with age you improve, becoming more mellow."

"We should make a fine couple," she said. "No longer young, it is true, but fine and full of sense."

"But it is because of that, because you are a true woman, I want your advice. But what I tell you is a secret. Is that understood?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I will tell no one," she said. "Not a soul. Not even the wife of the *predikant*. Not a soul, Jan."

"Well," he said, "there are diamonds on Sterkfontein."

"*Magtig!*" she said. "Diamonds? Diamonds are better than sheep on a farm."

"*Ja*," he said, "but I am a funny man."

"How are you funny?"

"I do not like strangers on my farm and I do not want money. I have enough. So I have come to ask you what to do."

"Since nobody knows you have diamonds on your farm, what does it matter?" she said.

"They will find out," he said, "and my peace of mind will be broken like a cup that falls on a stone floor."

"It is true there are diamonds not far off," she said. "There are diamonds at Swartpan. And Swartpan is only twenty miles from Sterkfontein."

"Did you ever see a diamond?" he asked.

"Only on a woman's hand." She looked down at her hand. "Never a wild diamond."

Putting his hand in his pocket, he brought out a little rag. It was one of Nella's handkerchiefs tied round the top with a *voorslag*. He undid the whiplash and, holding the open handkerchief toward her, said, "*Kyk*, look."

"Diamonds?"

"*Ja*," he said. He held one up.

"They do not shine much."

"That is only afterward. When they are wild they do not shine. The difference between a cut diamond and these," he said, "is the difference between a woman working in the kitchen and the same woman sitting in her *voorkamer* in a silk dress, with her hands folded in her lap and her ankles crossed in front of her."

"*Ja*," she said.

"Now that you understand why nothing must come out about this, tell me what I should do."

"Do?" she said. "Do nothing. But above all, allow no strangers on your land."

"But there is a right of way running through the farm that I cannot close. A right of way that is one hundred Cape feet wide."

"Then make people stay on it and do not allow them to stop."

"How shall I do that?" he asked.

"With a notice board. A white board with the writing on it in black letters."

"Like the one the new attorney has?"

"*Ja*, like that."

"Perhaps the same man who painted that sign could make it."

"*Ja*," she said.

"And perhaps," he said, "you, who are an educated woman, could arrange it for me. For I, as you know, have never mastered my letters."

"For you I will arrange it," she said.

"I will come and get it next Saturday."

"Come and we will drink coffee."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I do not know what I should do without you, Selina. I know of no one else I could trust with such a secret."

"It is safe with me, Jan."

"It is safe with you," he said. "That I know." He picked up his hat from beside his chair and then said, "*Totsiens*, Selina. You are a fine woman. You are like wine."

"You are a fine man," she said, "like an oak."

When he mounted his horse he thought: *Ja*, I am a fine man and Sterkfontein is a fine farm, and no less fine with diamonds on it. Wild diamonds, he said to himself. If you did not know better, rock crystals rubbed with a little axle grease looked very like diamonds. And by now, before he got home, half the world would know his secret. Such a story was too good to keep for more than an hour. First the *predikant's* wife, then the sign painter, and then the attorney. Selina Coetzee was a good woman, a fine woman. God had made her like that. Big — everything about her was big, including her tongue.

On Saturday, when the shopping was done, he tied the horses to *Mevrou* Coetzee's hitching post and went into the house with Nella. They drank coffee and ate rusks. *Mevrou* Coetzee said how pretty Nella was, and he said, "*Ja*, she's a *mooi meisie* and ripe as a plum. That is why I need that notice."

"It's ready," *Mevrou* Coetzee said, and she pointed to it.

"What does it say?" Smitty asked.

"It says that it is forbidden to loiter on the road or to move off it under danger of prosecution."

"That will keep the young bloods off," he said. He winked at the widow.

"Young bloods?" Nella said.

"*Ja*," he said. "When they come courting now, they must come right up to the house and no loitering behind trees waiting for my *mooi meisie* to come out to them. No," he said, "mine is a respectable house, and the courting must be done properly in the parlor, with the horse tied onto the stoep."

"But I —" Nella said.

"*Ja*, you," he said, "you have come to an age when young ladies begin to have thoughts in their heads that are beyond making butter and baking bread. Thank you," he said to the widow, "thank you, Selina," and, picking up the board, he went out to the cart.

Nella said, "*Oom*, Jan, what is this about men? There are no men."

"No," he said, "but there will be," and he began to laugh.

"It is not a laughing matter," Nella said, "to say things like that about me. I am a good girl. I do not go behind bushes with men. And besides, there are no men."

"It is the plan," he said. And he laughed till he was doubled up.

The next day being Sunday, Smitty did nothing. He drove Nella to church and thanked the Lord for delivering the enemy to him in so con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

venient a manner, and for the length of the tongue He had given to Selina Coetzee.

On Monday morning, by 8 o'clock, the board was up and the trap was baited. The board and Selina's whispers would be enough. Jan took his rifle from its place over the kitchen fire and leaned it against the wall of the stoep. Now all he had to do was to wait.

Nella asked him what the rifle was for.

"To enforce the law," he said. "To keep men on the straight and narrow path."

"Men?" she said. "What men?"

"The men who will come after my little pot of gold, my beautiful little maid."

"Uncle," she said, "are you well? Shall I make you coffee and fix you a purge of herbs?"

"You will see," he said, "and I need no purge."

"*Ja*," she said, "I will see."

He said, "And no going behind the bushes!"

This time she laughed, but she blushed a little also because of the ideas he was putting into her head.

It was a week before anything happened. Then one day, while he was working at his forge, sharpening the teeth of a harrow, Nella came running.

"Uncle," she said, "there is a cart coming with four horses and in it sits Jarrold with another man."

"The bait," he said. "He nibbles like a fish that sees a worm."

"I shall hide," she said.

"*Ja*," he said. "Hide like a modest maid till I call. Prepare coffee."

He went to the stoep and sat on a bench, with his rifle across his knees. The cart pulled up. A boy got out and went to the horses' heads. The two men got down. Leaning his rifle against the wall, Jan went to meet them. Holding out his hand, he said, "I am Jan Smit."

"Jarrold," the lawyer said.

"*Ja*," Jan said, "I have seen you in church."

"This is Mr. Fanshaw."

Smit put out his hand. "Come onto the stoep and drink coffee."

He shouted for coffee. Nella brought it.

"Now," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"This gentleman," Jarrold said, "is interested in your farm."

"It is a most interesting farm," Smitty said. "You saw my notice, perhaps. That is why I put it up. The farm is so interesting that I wish to keep it to myself." He picked up his rifle again, stroked the butt, and put it down.

Jarrold said, "Well, it's no use beating about the bush. My client wishes to buy Sterkfontein."

"The farm is not for sale," Smitty said.

"We would pay well."

"It is not for sale. A man does not sell his home."

"Well, perhaps you would sell the mineral rights?"

"Mineral rights? What minerals?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There are no minerals here, *Magtig!*" he said. "I made this place. I know every foot of it."

"*Ja*," Jarrold said, "but under the ground there may be some. It would be a speculation."

"Ah," Smitty said. "You wish to speculate? There is nothing wrong with that."

"Then you will sell the rights?"

"*Ja*, I will sell the rights. But not the farm."

"And we can prospect?"

"No," he said. "No prospecting, no holes, no strangers. If you want to speculate, you speculate."

"And the price?" Jarrold said.

"Ten thousand pounds in gold," Smitty said.

"You are mad," Jarrold said.

"I am of sound mind. I do not wish to sell. There are no minerals. And, what is more, I will only give you a week to make up your minds. I do not wish to be bothered all the time."

When they had gone, he stood on the stoep, with his rifle in the crook of his arm, watching them go. Young Molteno was the man he wanted now, and, saddling up his horse, he rode in to see him.

Molteno did transport work. He was a young man who would make a good husband for Nella. *Ja*, they were as good as married already, only they did not know it. With her married, he'd continue his courtship of Selina — not that she wouldn't jump at him like a fish after a fly in a pond, but there was no hurry about it, and it was pleasant to be called an oak by so handsome a woman, a fine woman who must weigh 250 pounds if she weighed an ounce.

Frikkie Molteno was easily found, and Smitty put the thing up to him — not the marriage, but the trick he wanted him to play, for this trick was the linchpin that held the structure of his plan together.

"If you want to make some money, Frikkie," he said, "I have a plan."

"*Ja*, *Oom* Jan," Frikkie said. "I want to make money. Money is good."

"It is good and this is easy. Do what I say and the money is yours — a hundred pounds, maybe."

"A hundred pounds?"

"*Ja*. You will go to the lawyer, Jarrold, and tell him you will bring him two bags of earth from my farm, just where my road crosses the drift, if he will give you a hundred pounds."

"He will laugh at me."

"He will not laugh if you look wise and say, '*Meneer*, a hundred pounds for such earth is cheap — who knows what you may not find in it?' Say, 'With that earth you will have something to show. Surely, with so much at stake, it is worth *speculating* a hundred pounds?' Use that word, Frikkie — '*speculate*' — and watch his face."

"I will use the word."

"But that is not all. He will say, 'How will you get it, since old Smitty sits on his stoep with his rifle in his hand and lets no one halt on the road?' And then you will say, 'I have a plan.' And he will say, 'What do you know about this matter, any-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way?' And you will say, 'I know that diamonds are valuable and that before long others will be in the race. Others who will be glad to pay a hundred pounds for the earth. I only came to see you first because you are a good man who goes to church on Sunday.' "

Frikkie said, "I heard something about diamonds."

Smitty said, "And you have an old ox that you are going to slaughter."

"*Ja*. Old Bloom. He is past work now. But what has this to do with the matter?"

"It has this to do. When Jarrold says, 'What is your plan?' you will say, 'I will go over the right of way with my wagon, and when I reach the spruit one of my oxen will fall dead.' "

"Why will it?"

"Bloom will fall dead," Smitty said. "You will see that he does — with poison. At the drift you will stop as if to fix a skey or a strop, and put poison into his mouth so that he falls dead."

"I could not poison Bloom," Molteno said. "He is a good ox. It would be like poisoning a friend."

"You were going to shoot him," Smitty said.

"To shoot is different."

"You can shoot him," Smitty said, "but you must tell Jarrold you will poison him."

"That I can do," Molteno said.

"And then you say to Jarrold, 'When he is dead, I will go running to the house and say, "Smitty, one of my oxen is dead by the spruit. He died suddenly and I had best bury him in case he had a contagious disease." ' And Smitty will say, 'Yes, Frikkie, bury him deep.' When you bury him, you will fill two bags with gravel from the drift. That is the plan."

"It's a pretty plan and I will do it."

"Then, *totsiens jong*, *totsiens* and good luck."

The very next day, Jan saw Molteno's wagon coming by. He watched it stop at the drift.

"Nella!" he shouted. "Comb your hair and put on your Sunday dress and the pink kappie I got you."

"*Ja*, I will if you say so, but why?"

"Because I say so — and fast."

He heard a shot in the distance and saw Frikkie running toward the house. It was a long run.

"*Magtig!*" Frikkie shouted when he got near. "My ox is dead — so suddenly I think it may be a plague. What shall I do?"

"Do? — you young rascal. Bury it. Bury it deep and fast. Come, I will get you a pick and shovels and give you two boys."

While the ox was being buried, Smitty told Nella to take coffee and rusks to the drift. In an hour she was back, her face as pink as her kappie.

"What happened?" he said.

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing, Uncle. They buried the ox, and Frikkie Molteno is coming to see you tonight."

"To see me?"

"To see us."

"You see what my notice has done?" he said. "It has brought a fine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

young man to our door. What did he say to you?"

"He said —" She paused. "He said he did not know I was so grown up."

"And nor were you. But now that you are, you cannot ungrow again."

Frikkie Molteno came as he had said he would.

"I got the money," he said, "and I'm grateful to you." He came close and whispered. "Bloom suffered nothing," he said.

"He has the earth?" Smitty asked.

"*Ja*, he has it."

"Good. Then sit with the girl. Pretend it is her you came to see. She must know nothing." He got up and went to the kraals to see his beasts.

"So you're back," Smitty said when Jarrold and Fanshaw came a month later. "What do you want now?"

"We're going to take a chance," Jarrold said. "We're going to speculate."

"You are mad. You are reckless men."

"We're sportsmen," Jarrold said. "It's a gamble but we'll buy."

Only the mineral rights, remember," Smitty said.

"*Ja*, the mineral rights. Bring the gold, Fanshaw."

He went out and came back with a boy to carry the little bags. It took three trips to the cart.

"The gold," Jarrold said. "Ten thousand golden sovereigns, and we have the deed. I will read it to you."

The deed was plain and straightforward. It stated that Johannes Smit ceded the mineral rights to John Creswell Fanshaw for the sum of ten thousand pounds, to be paid in gold.

"Nella!" Smitty shouted. "Come here!" He put the paper into her hands. "Read it," he said. "Read it aloud."

"You do not trust us?"

"*Meneer*," he said, "trust is a big word. I trust you, but since I have no letters, and since you drew up the contract, it seems just to me that one of my blood should read it also. Read, girl."

Nella read. It was correct.

"Now we will count the gold," Jan said.

They began to empty the bags one at a time on the table while they counted. Each heap, as he counted it, was pushed into an empty flour bag, except for one sovereign which was kept out as a check. At last it was done. Smitty counted the checking coins. There were ten of them. "Ten thousand pounds," he said. "Now I will sign. Bring the quill and the ink, Nella."

"Sign here," Jarrold said. Smitty signed his name, Jan Smit, with immense care, and very large. "I do not like to sign," he said, "but I can see no danger in this. A man taught me to sign," he said. "A stranger passing this way who was held up by a storm. It took almost a day before he was satisfied." He looked at his signature with pride, and drew a thick line under it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now we will sign, with the girl as a witness," Jarrold said.

The others signed.

Jarrold put the deed into his pocket.

"Now," Smitty said, "we will have a glass of dop. On an occasion like this, one should drink to the success of one's venture, should one not, *Meneer* Jarrold?"

Smitty poured the brandy and raised his glass. "To success," he said. "And now you can prospect, though I doubt if you will find much."

"We are in no hurry," Jarrold said. "It is just that we were afraid someone might get in ahead of us. You can't keep something like that quiet. And now we must be going."

Smitty watched them drive off.

Ja, he thought, till we meet again.

The next day, Smitty put on his best Sunday suit, and told Nella to put on her pink dress and pink kappie. "Like a rose you are, my fair one," he said. "A pink blushing rose."

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

"Many things, my child. We are going to the bank with the money which will come to you one day. After that I have some private business to do, but you will be safe enough in Frikkie's hands till I come back."

"Frikkie?" she said, blushing. "Oh that Frikkie! You are going to leave me alone with him?"

"With him and his ma."

"Oh," she said, "you are a very wicked uncle."

"I am a very clever one," Smitty said.

"Uncle," she said, "I do not understand what has been going on — with Jarrold, I mean."

"*Nee*, you do not understand, my child, because you have had other things on your mind, but the plan has worked. It is finished. Only the final nail remains to be driven, and the hammer is in my hands."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, my child, there are no diamonds here. Jarrold and Fanshaw got a sample of soil from Frikkie Molteno, salted it with stolen stones from Swartpan, and on the strength of the sample they raised the money to buy the farm. It is not their money, my child. It is the money of many people who hoped to take advantage of a simple farmer. Nor did they tell these people the price was ten thousand pounds. No, my child. They said it was more — much more — and the difference they put in their pockets."

"How did you know what they would do?"

"I know because I know jackals. It was something Jarrold could not resist. When he knew no one could prospect, he hired Frikkie to get the soil from the drift. When he found nothing in it, he put diamonds into the sample so that they could start a company. Now they will sell out their shares before work starts."

"And what will you do, Uncle?"

"We will go to the police, and they will find stones in Jarrold's possession which he cannot explain."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And then?"

"And then he will pay the price. Then he will go to work on the breakwater at Cape Town with the others of his kind. The other illicit diamond buyers. *Ja*," he said, "I knew that if I gave him enough rope, he'd hang himself."

When they reached the dorp, he pulled up at *Mevrou* Coetzee's house.

"I thought we were going to the bank," Nella said.

"I am going to the bank, but first I have business here, and you, my girl — will wait for me at Frikkie's house. If he is not there, wait with his ma, and tell her to send for him. Say that I am coming."

Selina Coetzee was pleased to see him. "You thought you would catch me with my house in disorder and my hair in curlers." She laughed at the idea.

"No," he said, "I have come to take you for a drive. I have something in the cart that you must see. Come," he said. "Put on your kappie and come to the bank with me."

They drove to the bank, and, leaving her, he went in and returned with the manager and two boys.

"There," he said, pointing to the back of the cart.

"What have you got?" Selina asked.

"Gold," he said.

They unloaded the bags of gold. Selina stood by his side while the money was weighed.

"*Magtig!*" she said. "I did not know there was so much gold in the world. And to see it sacked like potatoes — that is something to see."

"Ten thousand pounds," the bank manager said.

"*Ja*," Smitty said. "Now we will go back to your house and you will make me coffee."

"You are a masterful man," Selina said.

"And now that I am rich," he said, "I shall be more masterful. There will be no more delays and no more talk. You will marry me, Selina. This is your last chance. If you do not, I will find another woman."

"So it is me who had delayed things? Me, who was a ripe fruit waiting for your hand to pluck me. Me —"

"Make coffee," he said.

"*Ja*," she said.

He followed her into the kitchen. "When we have had coffee, we are going to the police," he said, "and then to Frikkie Molteno."

"Why the police?"

"To tell them that Jarrold has some stolen diamonds in his possession."

"Perhaps he got them on Sterkfontein?"

"There are no diamonds there. *Magtig*, do you think I have never washed out that ground by the sluit?"

"But you showed me diamonds, Jan. I told —"

He began to laugh. "*Ja*," he said, "I showed you my little *blink klippies*, and you told my secret. *Magtig*, I love you, Selina. To tell you a secret

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and not have you tell it again would be like expecting a hen not to cackle when she has laid an egg."

"I only told —"

"*Ja*, the *predikant's* wife, and the sign painter, and the attorney Jarrold when he came to call and asked you about the notice board that was being painted for me. You see, my love," he went on, "that was something Jarrold could not resist. A diamond farm that could not be prospected, for ten thousand pounds. A free gift, almost, from an old Boer who thought he was clever."

"But if there were no diamonds?"

"He put them in for his friend Fanshaw. He got them from Swartpan. Many are stolen there. It would not be the first time a farm has been salted with stolen stones."

"*Ja*," she said, "I see." Then she said, "And Nella? How does Nella like the idea of your marrying again?"

"She does not know — and she will soon be married herself. To Frikkie Molteno, though she does not know it yet. Even now she is with him. And that, too, I arranged by setting them side by side a time or two, and that, with a young man and a maid, is enough. With older people it might take longer."

"*Ja*," she said, "it might take years. But we shall make a handsome couple."

"*Ja*," he said. "You are like wine — you go to my head."

She said, "I had many offers of marriage, Jan. I am a fine-looking woman. It would be foolish to be so modest as not to recognize the fact." She preened herself.

"Like wine," he said.

"A fine-looking woman," she said again, "with property in the dorp and money in the bank. But my heart was set on you."

"That was natural enough," he said.

"And I knew, Jan, that if I gave you enough rope you'd hang yourself. *Ja*," she said, "give a man rope."

"What is it that you said, Selina?"

"I said give a man enough rope, and he'll hang himself. That is what you always said. *Magtig*. I remember the first time you said it, and I thought: What a man. What intelligence, a heart of gold, rugged as an oak and intelligent as well. So few men are intelligent, Jan."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRIZE-WINNING STORY

and another original for our **Black Mask** *department*

Excerpts from Autobiography Report (as supplied by the author): Orphaned at an early age, and grew up with aunt, uncle, cousin, and child-prodigy brother; jobbed around in jazz bands, expecting to be a chemist; switched and went to college, expecting to be a music teacher. All plans changed when drafted, and began to write "out of boredom in the army" (between air raids on Iwo Jima, as communications chief, S/Sgt. AAF radio). Honorably discharged, expecting to be a writer. Studied, wrote, married, finished first five-year plan of short stories, wrote a 58,000-word novel in 40 days, got impressive editorial reactions but no acceptance, got mad, wrote a second novel, got ecstatic editorial reactions but still no acceptance, got even madder, and went to work on a third novel . . .

Editorial P.S.: Willard Marsh has sold to the "Saturday Evening Post," has won a fellowship for serious poetry, and his long-time expectation of "becoming a person" is being realized.

P.P.S.: We think you will like Mr. Marsh's first story for EQMM. It is a tale of "earthquake weather" and "wee-hour noises" and, particularly, of two people caught in the "fell clutch of circumstance."

LIFE BEGINS AT 2:15

by WILLARD MARSH

EVEN NOW THE ROOM WAS STILL thick with heat. The tiny directional fan churned listlessly in the dense air, and overhead the bare droplight glared like a midget sun. Beyond the open window the hotel neon pulsed monotonously. Voices echoed in the street below, petulant from liquor or fatigue.

Jackie was sprawled on the bed in a nest of women's magazines. She hadn't been reading; just flipping pages, listening to the alarm clock on the bureau that kept ticking through the creak of the fan. At 2 A.M. she pushed to her feet and toured the room, hearing her heels flapping in time with the clock. There was no housework left to be done. Earlier in the evening she had done the shopping and mended a pair of shorts. Aimlessly, she emptied the ashtrays and dusted the leaves of the potted cactus.

From below she heard the house band finish its theme, going into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Good Night, Ladies in stop-time. Jackie dropped the dustcloth and went into a dance step, scowling in concentration as she tried to remember the old routine. Dressed in slacks, her thin legs kicking awkwardly, there was an oddly professional gloss to her movements. She was a slight, sallow brunette with sharp features and large grave eyes.

Suddenly she had to quit, dropping into a chair to cough rackingly. Getting out of practice, Jackie thought, keeping her eyes off the bureau. Without looking, she knew it was 2:25. The clock continued ticking. Like a bomb, she thought; or a heart, maybe. Then she heard the footsteps, the quick familiar knock. She jumped to her feet and ran to the door.

"Who is it?"

"House detective."

Jackie laughed and threw open the door. "What do you want me for?"

A slim muscular man in a summer tuxedo stood there. He looked a little like a jockey, except that he was too tall and hadn't seen enough sun.

"Excuse me, lady. Guess I got the wrong room," he said. "That is, unless you got a man concealed in here." He stepped inside and looked around strenuously for clues. "Whose shoes are those under the bed?"

"My husband's," Jackie said. "But he won't be home till real late."

"Don't sound so convincing."

He managed to grin and she managed to return it. Not much of a grin, but then it wasn't much of a joke.

"What's for supper?" Drake said.

She started to tell him but he wasn't listening. She got the hot plate and silverware down from the suitcase and began opening cans.

"How'd it go at the club tonight, Drake?"

"Got a little busy when I left. Crowd showed up from the convention." He was changing into his bathrobe and slippers. "Real sports."

"Heavy spenders?"

Drake gave her a look of unlimited patience. "Maybe back in Paducah or wherever they're from. Wherever the idea of a big time is matching nickels."

He wandered over to the saucepan she was stirring — chile con carne, spaghetti, and the pitted olives she had been saving.

He smiled tiredly. "Ah, such an enchanting bouillabaisse. And the breast of guinea hen —" he kissed his finger, "*c'est magnifique*!"

Jackie looked up, hurt.

"No, it's okay. Really." He patted her shoulder absently.

"I'm learning, honest, Drake. I study the magazines every day," she said. "I'll be a fine cook for you when we have our own house."

"Sure. How about a nice cold bottle of wine with that?"

He picked up the phone and ordered a chilled fifth of burgundy. It was after hours, but he knew his way around. Then as he settled himself in the armchair with the sports section, Jackie plunged into a rambling account of her day: the gossip at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

supermarket, the guests in the lobby, the changing street below the window. He wasn't listening, he had things on his mind; but it didn't matter, all this was only temporary. She dished the food out on the desk and they were just sitting down, when there was a sudden rap on the door.

She saw Drake stiffen. He gave her a wide unseeing stare, full of hopelessness and appeal. The knock was repeated.

"Room service!"

Drake grinned in embarrassment. He went to the door and took the tray from the bellboy, overtipping him as usual.

"Wine is really chilled," he said, "feel it."

Jackie waited. "Something happened tonight. Tell me."

"Now, baby, I'm just a little jumpy." He was suddenly busy opening the bottle. "Been smoking too much —"

"It's something else," she said.

"Can't think of something else." He tried to smile her out of it. "Just an ordinary night. Oh, yes, I picked up a new trick. Watch, this is a nifty . . ."

Jackie watched him break out a deck of cards and riffle them with blurring speed. His pale manicured hands began dealing them out like a machine.

"Pick a card," he said, "any card, and tell me what suit you want it to be."

She automatically pointed to a card, then shoved them all aside.

"Drake, if you don't tell me what *hap*pened . . ."

He sat down. "I thought I had company on the way home," he said wearily. "A big sedan that looked like money. He sniffed after me for a while, then lost interest. That's all." He shrugged.

"Rocco," she said. "Drake, was it Rocco?"

"How do I know? Why look for *things*?"

She tried to keep her voice level, sensible. "Drake, what'll we do? Isn't there —"

"Nothing," he said. "Drink your wine."

They sat, feeling the heat and the silence, with the food lying there untouched. The ticking of the bureau clock persisted through the burr of the fan.

"Earthquake weather," Drake said. "You can almost feel the ground breaking up beneath you." He picked up his glass. "This is really living, isn't it?"

"Don't," she said. "Keep quiet. You want to change our luck?"

He smiled a little, as if remembering an old joke, and tossed off his wine.

"Drake, I'll dance again," she said. "Won't I dance again?"

"Sure, baby. You'll be great."

"But I'd rather be just us, the way we are. The way we can be."

Drake poured another glass of wine, downed it as if it were medicine, and reached for the bottle.

"Sure," he said, "we'll be great."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Down in the street a cab had rolled up with a tipsy convention delegate. The driver was loitering beneath the canopy to argue with the doorman, about either a horse or a woman of doubtful blood lines. Their voices fell sluggishly in the hot windless dark. Jackie turned from the window and stood in the fan's thin stream. It was 2:30. Late. She couldn't remember it ever being any later. That's the most it ever took him for the short drive home, no matter what.

She could have used a drink, except that the bar was closed and anyway it wasn't good for her except maybe now and then some wine. She sat down at the desk and sipped her coffee. It had grown cold. She set it down to cough for maybe half a minute, then finished the cold coffee. The silence was woven of wee-hour noises: the rhythmic crackle of the neons, the drained voices below, the limping fan and the steady tread of the clock. Her right hand squeezed itself shut as if she were trying to brake time itself.

Then she heard the footsteps.

Jackie jumped to the door, even before they halted outside. Breathing hard in relief, she waited. There was a brisk knock.

She swallowed, called brightly, "Who is it?"

"The plumber."

She opened the door, trying not to smile. "What do you want me for?"

"Excuse me, lady. Guess I got the wrong room." He turned to leave.

Jackie threw the door wide. "I was just getting ready for bed," she said. "Won't you come in?"

"Well, it's a little against union rules."

He stepped in cautiously and Jackie shoved the door shut.

"You jerk, if I ever do run away with the plumber I guess I'll have grounds."

"Baby, I couldn't phone. I was tied up in traffic."

"What traffic?"

"You know, from the convention," Drake said casually. "What's for supper? I could eat a whole horse, beginning at the —"

"Drake, for the love of God!" Jackie was suddenly scared. "Don't keep hiding things from me. I'm not a kid any more."

He dropped into the armchair. "No, I guess you're not," he said. "It's the healthy life we lead."

"They followed you again?"

"I'm not sure. Think it was a different car this time. I lost them, but it's just a waste of gas. They know where to find me."

Jackie had to sit down. She set her hands against her thighs to still them. "Why do we have to live like criminals?" she whispered. "What did we do?"

"The crime I committed," Drake said patiently, "was happening to be around when Rocco DeLiso was putting a business acquaintance in a whiskey barrel. Maybe it was one of those sentimental things, like dipping baby shoes in bronze. Regardless, Rocco's very shy about an audience."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But isn't there anything you can —"

"Sure, I can tell him I didn't really see it. And in case he doesn't believe me, I can tell him I'll keep it a secret."

"But we can't just sit here and *wait* for them."

"What, run and tip him for sure?" He shook his head. "Besides, where can we go? It's a big organization. Anyway, he can't be positive," he said. "It was pretty dark. I could have been a dozen other people, he'd have to do a lot of checking. A little guy like me is hardly worth his time."

"Well, we're not going to take the chance!" Jackie ran to the closet.

"Where you think you're going?"

She didn't answer him. She was too busy pulling down the suitcase from the top shelf. Then she felt his hands on her shoulders, facing her around.

"It won't work," Drake said gently. "My education's been too neglected. The only thing I know is dealing cards." He spread his hands fan-wise. "See these? They're a set of tools. It took me all my life to learn how they work. You think I could put them in dish water? And if I could, you think we could live on it?"

"I can work," Jackie said. "I can work for both of us."

"Where? Dishing 'em up in some hash house? And with your health? No," he said, "we'll stay put. Till something breaks. People in Rocco's business don't usually collect their annuities."

"Who does?" she said bitterly. "That's a hell of a lot to wait for."

He nodded wearily. "I know, it isn't much. But I'm not complaining about price tags these days. I'm not even supposed to be here. It's just an accident I am," he said. "I was supposed to be in a whiskey barrel myself, that night I saw too much from the office window. All Rocco got was my face split in three parts by the grill, and that should've been enough. But something slipped up, I got a free ride." He smiled at her. "Know what that means?" She shook her head. "It means I'm someone you never were supposed to meet," he said. "A stranger. That's why I knock when I come calling."

Jackie began laughing softly.

"You see?" he said. "Each night I'm here by accident. Life begins all over at 2:15, and it's always for the first time."

"What a guy," she said.

"Look, how about some food?" he said in embarrassment. "Want to have the Chinese send up some chow mein?"

"Wouldn't that be nice? But show me our house again first."

"Oh, that. I thought you'd have it memorized by now," Drake grinned. "Okay, here's the layout." He sprawled on the floor beside her and traced an imaginary rectangle on the rug. "This is the barn, over here. Next to the pigpen."

"What color is it?"

"Red, naturally. You always have to have a red barn. It's one of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rules. And here's the chicken coop. That's where we get our eggs."

"How many, you suppose?"

"Oh, probably a half dozen or so a day. Per hen, that is. Probably not so many from the roosters."

"Roosters? They don't lay eggs!"

"Go on, where'd you hear that?"

"Never mind, I'm not as dumb as you think."

"All right, now watch," he said. "This is the cottage, up on the hill. You get to it by a little winding road. . . ."

The idiot white face of the clock regarded Jackie from the bureau. When it said 2:30 she turned it to the wall. Now time had stopped, and he could come whenever he was able and it wouldn't mean a thing. Sitting on the edge of bed, with the fan in her hair like a tired breeze, she tried to see the chicken coop through the pattern of the rug. But it never worked unless Drake was there. If she had another cigarette it would only make her start coughing.

She lay back on the bed, building a little pattern to keep from thinking, feeling herself drift and return in the cradled heat: *this is the cottage and this is the hill, and this is the well that we'll have to drill* . . . She could sleep some, she tried to fool herself, but it had been a hot tiring day. As if she could ever really sleep, until his knock awakened her. . . .

She came instantly awake. There had been no sound to do it, only the racing of the clock. Even before she turned it around, Jackie knew it would be an hour she had never seen just by herself.

It was 4:40.

This is the pigpen and this is the barn . . . and the desk clerk was stupidly at her ear to say,

"That's right, lady. Four-forty on the nose."

Jackie set the phone down, then caught it up before the clerk even switched off. She gave him the number of the club and then someone was there to say, Sure, Drake left the end of his shift, the same as always.

"I mean, there hadn't been a raid or anything?"

"You trying to be funny, lady?"

That's it, maybe she was trying to be funny. She could feel her shoulders start to shake with laughter, looking down at the dead phone there in the dead room. And suddenly there it was, the loud knock echoing stubbornly, as if it had failed to wake her before. Jackie's heart lifted in relief.

"Coming!"

She ran to the door and slid the latch back. Then she remembered.

"Who is it?" she sang.

There was a muffled response. He's hurt, she thought — or maybe only drunk. Who cares, he can be anything.

She threw open the door with a laugh. "What do you want me for?"

A paunchy little man with a blue convention badge in his lapel stood swaying before her.

"Excuse me, lady," he said cheerfully. "Guess I got the wrong room."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE EXPLOITS OF GERVASE FEN

BLACKMAILERS HAVE THEIR USES

by EDMUND CRISPIN

"BLACKMAILERS?" DETECTIVE-INspector Humbleby finished his coffee and began groping in his pocket for a cheroot. "Well, yes, one does of course come across them from time to time. And although you may be surprised to hear this, in my experience they're generally rather nicer than any other kind of crook." Humbleby searched another pocket. "Writers of fiction," he went on, "get very heated and indignant about blackmail. Yet by and large, it's always seemed to me personally to be one of the least odious and most socially useful of crimes. To be a blackmailer's victim, you do almost invariably have to be *guilty* of something or other. I mean that unlike coshing and larceny and embezzlement and so forth, blackmail has a — a punitive function . . .

"Naturally, I'm not claiming that it ought to be encouraged." Having at last disinterred his cheroot, Humbleby proceeded to light it. "At the Yard, we have plenty of occasions for thinking that we're being deprived of evidence against a suspect in order that someone else may use it for private profit.

"On the other hand, a blackmailer can *acquire* such evidence more easily than we can — not having Judges' Rules to hamper him — and like Socrates in the syllogism, he's mortal. The death of a known blackmailer is a great event for us, I can tell you. It's astonishing the number of 'Unsolved' files that can be tidied up by a quick run through the deceased's papers. Sometimes even murders — Samuel Carew, for instance: we'd never have hanged him if a blackmailer hadn't ferreted out an incriminating letter and then got himself run over by a bus."

Humbleby paused to take a series of deep puffs, and Gervase Fen took advantage of the pause to stop the club waiter. "Two Armagnacs, please . . . Carew? The name's vaguely familiar, but I can't remember any details."

"It was interesting," said Humbleby, "because the incriminating letter didn't on the surface *look* incriminating at all. There were these two brothers, you see, Americans, Sam and Harry Carew. They came over here — their first visit to England — early in April 1951, Sam to work in the office of the London Correspondent to a Chicago paper, Harry to write a book. New country, fresh beginning. But they'd hardly had a chance to unpack before Harry succumbed at long last to the cumulative effects of his daily bottle of bourbon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With the result that *his* first few weeks among the Limeys were spent at a sanatorium in South Wales — Carmarthenshire, to be exact: no alcohol, no tobacco, lots of milk to drink, regular brisk walks in the surrounding countryside — you know the sort of thing.

"Harry didn't like that very much. His brisk walks tended to be in the direction of pubs. But at the same time he did acquire an awe, amounting almost to positive fear, of the formidable old doctor who ran the place. So that when at last he decided that he couldn't stand the régime any longer, he felt constrained to arrange for a rather more than ordinarily unobtrusive departure, such as wouldn't involve him in having to face a lot of reproaches for his failure to stay the course. Quite simply, abandoning his belongings, he went out for one of his walks and failed to return.

"That was on the afternoon of May seventh. About mid-day the next day, *both* brothers arrived by car at Brixham in Devon, where they took rooms at the Bolton Hotel; for after only a month's journalism Sam had been sacked, and so had been free to respond to Harry's SOS from the sanatorium, and to assist in his flight. Once in Brixham, they proceeded to enjoy themselves. Among other things, they bought — actually *bought* — a small Bermudian sloop. And did quite a lot of sailing in it. . . .

"Then, on the evening of the twelfth, having ignored numerous warnings from the weather-wise, they got themselves swept out into mid-Channel by a gale. And in the turmoil of wind and darkness Harry was knocked overboard by the boom and drowned.

"That, at least, was Sam's account of the matter, when the Dartmouth lifeboat picked him up; and it was a credible enough story. Even the subsequent discovery that Harry's life had been well insured, and that Sam was the beneficiary, failed to shake it. If a crime *had* been committed, it was undetectable; the police found, with the inevitable result that in due course the insurance companies had to pay up. As to the body, what was left of that came up in a trawl about the beginning of September, near Start Point. By then there wasn't much chance of diagnosing the cause of death. But the teeth identified it as Harry Carew beyond any reasonable doubt.

"So that without Barney Stringer, the blackmailer, that would have been the end of that."

Humbleby relit his cheroot. "You see, Barney Stringer was clever. He was a professional, of course. Though he'd been inside several times, he always went straight back to blackmail as soon as he'd done his term. So you can imagine that when a Number 88 bus ran over him, in Whitehall, we lost no time at all getting into his house. And that was where, among a lot of other very interesting stuff, we found the letter — *the* letter.

"To start with, we couldn't make anything of it at all. Even after we'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

linked the 'Harry' of the signature with Harry Carew, it was still a long while before we could make out what Barney had wanted with the thing. However, we did see the light eventually. . . . Wait and I'll do you a copy."

Humbleby produced a notebook and began to write. "I looked at that letter so hard and so often," he murmured, "that it's engraved in my brain."

"Envelope with it?" Fen asked.

"No, no envelope. Incidentally, for the record, our handwriting people were unanimous that Harry Carew *had written it* — that it wasn't a forgery, I mean — and also that nothing in it had subsequently been added or erased or altered . . . There."

Humbleby tore the sheet out and handed it to Fen, who read:

"You-Know-Where,
"6/5/51.

"Dear Sam,

"I'm just about fed up with this dump — time I moved. When you get this, drop everything and bring the car to a little place five or six miles from here called Llanegwad (County Carmarthen). There's a beer joint called the Rose, where I risked a small drink this morning. From 6:00 p.m. on I'll be in it: Private Bar (so-called). Seriously, if I don't move around a bit I'll go nuts. This is *URGENT*.

"Harry"

"M'm," said Fen. "Yes. I notice one thing."

"Actually, there are *two* things to notice."

"Are there? All right. But finish the story first."

"The rest's short if not sweet," said Humbleby. "We had Sam down and confronted him with the letter, and of course he said exactly what you'd expect — that this was the SOS Harry had sent him from the sanatorium, properly dated and with the distance from Llanegwad correct, and so on and so forth. So then we arrested him."

"For murder?"

"Not to start with, no. Just for conspiracy to defraud the insurance companies."

"I see. . . . Part of it is simple, of course," said Fen, who was still examining Humbleby's scrawl. "When an American uses '6/5/51.' in writing to another American, he means not the sixth of May — as we British mean — but the fifth of June. On the other hand, Sam and Harry, having settled in England, may have decided that it would save confusion if they used the English system of dating."

"Which is just what Sam — when we pointed the problem out to him — told us they *had* decided to do." Humbleby shook his head sadly. "Not that it helped the poor chap."

Fen considered the letter again. And then suddenly he chuckled.

"Don't tell me," he said, "that May sixth, 1951 was a *Sunday*?"

"Bull's eye! It was, indeed. Sunday in Wales. No pubs open for Harry to have even the smallest of small drinks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at. Therefore, Harry was using the *American* system of dating, and his letter was written on June fifth, four weeks *after* he was supposed to have been swept overboard into the Channel. Insurance fraud."

"And Harry getting restive in his hide-out near the sanatorium, and Sam suddenly thinking how nice it would be not to have to *share* the insurance money. . . ." Fen chuckled.

"So back to Brixham, unobtrusively, by night, and out to sea again in the sloop. And that time," Humbleby concluded, "Harry really did go overboard."

"And you found enough evidence for a murder charge?"

"As soon as we stopped worrying about May sixth, and started concentrating on the period after June fifth, we most certainly did. Mind you, it *could* have been difficult. But luckily Sam had had the cabin of the sloop revarnished at the end of May, and we found human blood on top of the new varnish — not much, after all that time, but enough to establish that it belonged to Harry's rather unusual group and sub-groups. Taken with the other things, that convinced the jury all right. And they hanged him. . . .

"But you see now why I'm sometimes inclined to say a kind word for people like Barney Stringer. Because really, you know, the credit in the Carew case was all his. Even if we'd possessed that letter at the outset, we could easily have missed its significance. I worked hard on it only because it had come from Barney's collection, and I knew he didn't accumulate other people's correspondence just for fun.

"But *he* had no such inducement. With Barney, it was just a consummate natural talent for smelling out even the most deodorized of rats. What a detective that man would have made. . . . Do you know, they gave me a full month's leave, as a reward for handling it so brilliantly. And it was all thanks to Barney. . . ."

Humbleby reached for his glass. "No, Gervase, I don't care what the novelists say. I *like* blackmailers. Salt of the earth. Here's to them."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Robert Louis Stevenson fought ill health all his 44 years of life. There were times, between attacks and relapses, when he was completely incapacitated, and even when his health was at its best, he seldom could write for more than a few consecutive hours at a time. It is literally true that most of his writing was done in bed. Yet he produced enough superb work to make up the famous Edinburgh Edition of 28 volumes, and in every field of literature he tried, he left masterpieces — TREASURE ISLAND *and* KIDNAPPED *in romance,* A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES *and* UNDERWOODS *in poetry,* NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS *and* STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE *in mystery, and a few precious books containing some of the noblest and most original essays in the English language. On June 28, 1888, he left San Francisco in the schooner "Casco" on "what was only intended to be a pleasure excursion but turned into a voluntary exile prolonged until the hour of his death." He spent the last four years of his life at Samoa, and when he died, the Samoans, who called him Tusitala (Teller of Tales) and who had looked on him as their chief, buried his body on the peak of Vaca, high above the Pacific Ocean which he had grown to love . . .*

Many critics believe that "Markheim" is Robert Louis Stevenson's finest short story. Many critics go even further in their evaluation. Certainly "Markheim" is one of the greatest short stories of crime ever written; but even more, "Markheim" is considered, by critics all over the world, to be one of the ten best short stories in the whole history of literature.

MARKHEIM

by ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

"YES," SAID THE DEALER, "OUR windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend of my superior knowledge. Some are dishonest," and here he held up the candle, so that the light fell strongly on his visitor, "and in that case," he continued, "I profit by my virtue."

Markheim had but just entered from the daylight streets, and his eyes had not yet grown familiar with the mingled shine and darkness in the shop. At these pointed words, and before the near presence of the flame, he blinked painfully and looked aside.

The dealer chuckled. "You come to me on Christmas Day," he resumed, "when you know that I am alone in my house, put up my shutters, and make a point of refusing business. Well, you will have to pay for that;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you will have to pay for my loss of time, when I should be balancing my books; you will have to pay, besides, for a kind of manner that I remark in you today very strongly. I am the essence of discretion, and ask no awkward questions; but when a customer cannot look me in the eye, he has to pay for it." The dealer once more chuckled; and then changed to his usual business voice, though still with a note of irony. "You can give, as usual, a clear account of how you came into the possession of the object?" he continued. "Still your uncle's cabinet? A remarkable collector, sir!"

And the little, pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tiptoe, looking over the top of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head with every mark of disbelief. Markheim returned his gaze with one of infinite pity, and a touch of horror.

"This time," said he, "you are in error. I have not come to sell, but to buy. I have no curios to dispose of; my uncle's cabinet is bare to the wainscot; even were it still intact, I have done well on the Stock Exchange, and should more likely add to it than otherwise, and my errand today is simplicity itself. I seek a Christmas present for a lady," he continued, waxing more fluent as he struck into the speech he had prepared; "and certainly I owe you every excuse for thus disturbing you upon so small a matter. But the thing was neglected yesterday; I must produce my little compliment at dinner; and, as you very well know, a rich marriage is not a thing to be neglected."

There followed a pause, during which the dealer seemed to weigh this statement incredulously. The ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber of the shop, and the faint rushing of the cabs in a near thoroughfare, filled up the interval of silence.

"Well, sir," said the dealer, "be it so. You are an old customer after all; and if, as you say, you have the chance of a good marriage, far be it from me to be an obstacle. Here is a nice thing for a lady now," he went on, "this hand glass — Fifteenth Century, warranted; comes from a good collection, too; but I reserve the name, in the interests of my customer, who was just like yourself, my dear sir, the nephew and sole heir of a remarkable collector."

The dealer, while he thus ran on in his dry and biting voice, had stooped to take the object from its place; and, as he had done so, a shock had passed through Markheim, a start both of hand and foot, a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face. It passed as swiftly as it came, and left no trace beyond a certain trembling of the hand that now received the glass.

"A glass," he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. "A glass? For Christmas? Surely not?"

"And why not?" cried the dealer. "Why not a glass?"

Markheim was looking upon him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with an indefinable expression. "You ask me why not?" he said. "Why, look here — look in it — look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I — nor any man."

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. "Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard favored," said he.

"I ask you," said Markheim, "for a Christmas present, and you give me this — this damned reminder of years and sins and follies — this hand-conscience! Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind? Tell me. It will be better for you if you do. Come, tell me about yourself. I hazard a guess now, that you are in secret a very charitable man?"

The dealer looked closely at his companion. It was very odd, Markheim did not appear to be laughing; there was something in his face like an eager sparkle of hope, but not mirth.

"What are you driving at?" the dealer asked.

"Not charitable?" returned the other, gloomily. "Not charitable; not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. Is that all? Dear God, man, is that all?"

"I will tell you what it is," began the dealer, with some sharpness, and then broke off again into a chuckle. "But I see this is a love match of yours, and you have been drinking the lady's health."

"Ah!" cried Markheim, with a strange curiosity. "Ah, have you been in love? Tell me about that."

"I," cried the dealer, "I in love! I never had the time, nor have I the time today for all this nonsense. Will you take the glass?"

"Where is the hurry?" returned Markheim. "It is very pleasant to stand here talking; and life is so short and insecure that I would not hurry away from any pleasure — no, not even from so mild a one as this. We should rather cling, cling to what little we can get, like a man at a cliff's edge. Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it — a cliff a mile high — high enough, if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity. Hence it is best to talk pleasantly. Let us talk of each other; why should we wear this mask? Let us be confidential. Who knows, we might become friends?"

"I have just one word to say to you," said the dealer. "Either make your purchase, or walk out of my shop."

"True, true," said Markheim. "Enough fooling. To business. Show me something else."

The dealer stooped once more, this time to replace the glass upon the shelf, his thin blond hair falling over his eyes as he did so. Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his great-coat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; at the same time many different emotions were depicted together on his face — terror, horror and resolve,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fascination and a physical repulsion; and through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.

"This, perhaps, may suit," observed the dealer; and then, as he began to re-arise, Markheim bounded from behind upon his victim. The long, skewerlike dagger flashed and fell. The dealer struggled like a hen, striking his temple on the shelf, and then tumbled on the floor in a heap.

Time had some score of small voices in that shop, some stately and slow as was becoming to their great age; others garrulous and hurried. All these told out the seconds in an intricate chorus of tickings. Then the passage of a lad's feet, heavily running on the pavement, broke in upon these smaller voices and startled Markheim into the consciousness of his surroundings. He looked about him awfully. The candle stood on the counter, its flame solemnly wagging in a draught; and by that inconsiderable movement, the whole room was filled with noiseless bustle and kept heaving like a sea: the tall shadows nodding, the gross blots of darkness swelling and dwindling as with respiration, the faces of the portraits and the china gods changing and wavering like images in water. The inner door stood ajar, and peered into that leaguer of shadows with a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger.

From these fear-stricken rovings, Markheim's eyes returned to the body of his victim, where it lay both humped and sprawling, incredibly small and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserly clothes, in that ungainly attitude, the dealer lay like so much sawdust. Markheim had feared to see it, and, lo! it was nothing. And yet, as he gazed, this bundle of old clothes and pool of blood began to find eloquent voices. There it must lie; there was none to work the cunning hinges or direct the miracle of locomotion — there it must lie till it was found. Found! ay, and then? Then would this dead flesh lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with the echoes of pursuit. Ay, dead or not, this was still the enemy. "Time was that when the brains were out," he thought; and the first word struck into his mind. Time, now that the deed was accomplished — time, which had closed for the victim, had become momentous for him.

The thought was yet in his mind, when, first one and then another, with every variety of pace and voice — one deep as the bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz — the clocks began to strike the hour of 3 in the afternoon.

The sudden outbreak of so many tongues in that dumb chamber staggered him. He began to bestir himself, going to and fro with the candle, beleaguered by moving shadows, and startled to the soul by chance reflections. In many rich mirrors, some of home designs, some from Venice or Amsterdam, he saw his face repeated and repeated, as it were an army of spies; his own eyes met and detected

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him; and the sound of his own steps, lightly as they fell, vexed the surrounding quiet. And still as he continued to fill his pockets, his mind accused him with a sickening iteration, of the thousand faults of his design. He should have chosen a more quiet hour; he should have prepared an alibi; he should not have used a knife; he should have been more cautious, and only bound and gagged the dealer, and not killed him; he should have been more bold, and killed the servant also; he should have done all things otherwise; poignant regrets, weary, incessant toiling of the mind to change what was unchangeable, to plan what was now useless, to be the architect of the irrevocable past. Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot; the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish; or he beheld, in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows and the black coffin.

Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army. It was impossible, he thought, but that some rumor of the struggle must have reached their ears and set on edge their curiosity; and now, in all the neighboring houses, he divined them sitting motionless and with uplifted ear — solitary people, condemned to spend Christmas dwelling alone on memories of the past, and now startlingly recalled from that tender exercise; happy family parties, struck into silence round the table, the mother still with raised finger: every degree and age and humor, but all, by their own hearts, prying and hearkening and weaving the rope that was to hang him. Sometimes it seemed to him he could not move too softly; the clink of the tall Bohemian goblets rang out loudly like a bell; and alarmed by the bigness of the ticking, he was tempted to stop the clocks. And then, again, with a swift transition of his terrors, the very silence of the place appeared a source of peril, and a thing to strike and freeze the passer-by; and he would step more boldly, and bustle aloud among the contents of the shop, and imitate, with elaborate bravado, the movements of a busy man at ease in his own house.

But he was now so pulled about by different alarms that, while one portion of his mind was still alert and cunning, another trembled on the brink of lunacy. One hallucination in particular took a strong hold on his credulity. The neighbor hearkening with white face beside his window, the passerby arrested by a horrible surmise on the pavement — these could at worst suspect, they could not know; through the brick walls and shuttered windows only sounds could penetrate. But here, within the house, was he alone? He knew he was; he had watched the servant set forth sweethearting, in her poor best, "out for the day" written in every ribbon and smile. Yes, he was alone,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of course; and yet, in the bulk of empty house above him, he could surely hear a stir of delicate footing — he was surely conscious, inexplicably conscious of some presence. Ay, surely; to every room and corner of the house his imagination followed it; and now it was a faceless thing, and yet had eyes to see with; and again it was a shadow of himself; and yet again behold the image of the dead dealer, reinspired with cunning and hatred.

At times, with a strong effort, he would glance at the open door which still seemed to repel his eyes. The house was tall, the skylight small and dirty, the day blind with fog; and the light that filtered down to the ground story was exceedingly faint, and showed dimly on the threshold of the shop. And yet, in that strip of doubtful brightness, did there not hang, wavering, a shadow?

Suddenly, from the street outside, a very jovial gentleman began to beat with a staff on the shop door, accompanying his blows with shouts and railleries in which the dealer was continually called upon by name. Markheim, smitten into ice, glanced at the dead man. But no! he lay quite still; he was fled away far beyond ear-shot of these blows and shoutings; he was sunk beneath seas of silence; and his name, which would once have caught his notice above the howling of a storm, had become an empty sound. And presently the jovial gentleman desisted from his knocking and departed.

Here was a broad hint to hurry what remained to be done, to get forth from this accusing neighborhood, to plunge into a bath of London multitudes, and to reach, on the other side of day, that haven of safety and apparent innocence — his bed. One visitor had come: at any moment another might follow and be more obstinate. To have done the deed, and yet not to reap the profit, would be too abhorrent a failure. The money, that was now Markheim's concern; and as a means to that, the keys.

He glanced over his shoulder at the open door, where the shadow was still lingering and shivering; and with no conscious repugnance of the mind, yet with a tremor of the belly, he drew near the body of his victim. The human character had quite departed. Like a suit half stuffed with bran, the limbs lay scattered, the trunk doubled, on the floor; and yet the thing repelled him. Although so dingy and inconsiderable to the eye, he feared it might have more significance to the touch. He took the body by the shoulders, and turned it on its back. It was strangely light and supple, and the limbs, as if they had been broken, fell into the oddest postures. The face was robbed of all expression; but it was as pale as wax, and shockingly smeared with blood about one temple. That was, for Markheim, the one displeasing circumstance. It carried him back, upon the instant, to a certain fair day in a fishers' village; a gray day, a piping wind, a large

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crowd upon the street, the blare of brasses, the booming of drums, the nasal voice of a ballad singer; and a boy going to and fro, buried over head in the crowd and divided between interest and fear, until, coming out upon the chief place of concourse, he beheld a booth and a great screen with pictures, dismally designed, garishly colored: Brownrigg with her apprentice; the Mannings with their murdered guest; Weare in the death-grip of Thurtell; and a score besides of famous crimes. The thing was as clear as an illusion; he was once again that little boy; he was looking once again, and with the same sense of physical revolt, at these vile pictures; he was still stunned by the thumping of the drums. A bar of that day's music returned upon his memory; and at that, for the first time, a qualm came over him, a breath of nausea, a sudden weakness of the joints, which he must instantly resist and conquer.

He judged it more prudent to confront than to flee from these considerations, looking the more hardily in the dead face, bending his mind to realize the nature and greatness of his crime. So little a while ago, that face had moved with every change of sentiment, that pale mouth had spoken, that body had been all on fire with governable energies; and now, and by his act, that piece of life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. So he reasoned in vain; he could rise to no more remorseful consciousness; the same heart which had shuddered before the painted effigies of crime, looked on its reality unmoved. At best, he felt a gleam of pity for one who had been endowed in vain with all those faculties that can make the world a garden of enchantment, one who had never lived and who was now dead. But of penitence, no, not a tremor.

With that, shaking himself clear of these considerations, he found the keys and advanced towards the open door of the shop. Outside, it had begun to rain smartly; and the sound of the shower upon the roof had banished silence. Like some dripping cavern, the chambers of the house were haunted by an incessant echoing, which filled the ear and mingled with the ticking of the clocks. And, as Markheim approached the door, he seemed to hear, in answer to his own cautious tread, the steps of another foot withdrawing up the stair. The shadow still palpitated loosely on the threshold. He threw a ton's weight of resolve upon his muscles, and drew back the door.

The faint, foggy daylight glimmered dimly on the bare floor and stairs; on the bright suit of armor posted, halbert in hand, upon the landing; and on the dark wood-carvings, and framed pictures that hung against the yellow panels of the wainscot. So loud was the beating of the rain through all the house that, in Markheim's ears, it began to be distinguished into many different sounds. Footsteps and sighs, the tread of regiments marching in the distance,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the clink of money in the counting, and the creaking of doors held stealthily ajar, appeared to mingle with the patter of the drops upon the cupola and the gushing of the water in the pipes. The sense that he was not alone grew upon him to the verge of madness. On every side he was haunted and begirt by presences. He heard them moving in the upper chambers; from the shop, he heard the dead man getting to his legs; and as he began with a great effort to mount the stairs, feet fled quietly before him and followed stealthily behind. If he were but deaf, he thought, how tranquilly he would possess his soul! And then again, and hearkening with ever fresh attention, he blessed himself for that unresting sense which held the outposts and stood a trusty sentinel upon his life. His head turned continually on his neck; his eyes, which seemed starting from their orbits, scouted on every side, and on every side were half rewarded as with the tail of something nameless vanishing. The four-and-twenty steps to the first floor were four-and-twenty agonies.

On that first story the doors stood ajar, three of them like three ambushes, shaking his nerves like the throats of cannon. He could never again, he felt, be sufficiently immured and fortified from men's observing eyes; he longed to be home, girt in by walls, buried among bedclothes, and invisible to all but God. And at that thought he wondered a little, recollecting tales of other murderers and the fear they were said to entertain of heavenly avengers. It was not so, at least, with him. He feared the laws of nature, lest, in their callous and immutable procedure, they should preserve some damning evidence of his crime. He feared tenfold more, with a slavish, superstitious terror, some scission in the continuity of man's experience, some wilful illegality of nature. He played a game of skill, depending on the rules, calculating consequence from cause; and what if nature, as the defeated tyrant overthrew the chess-board, should break the mold of their succession? The like had befallen Napoleon (so writers said) when the winter changed the time of its appearance. The like might befall Markheim; the solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his foot like quicksands and detain him in their clutch; ay, and there were soberer accidents that might destroy him: if, for instance, the house should fall and imprison him beside the body of his victim; or the house next door should fly on fire, and the firemen invade him from all sides. These things he feared; and, in a sense, these things might be called the hands of God reached forth against sin. But about God himself he was at ease; his act was doubtless exceptional, but so were his excuses, which God knew; it was there, and not among men, that he felt sure of justice.

When he had got safe into the drawing-room, and shut the door behind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him, he was aware of a respite from alarms. The room was quite dismantled, uncarpeted besides, and strewn with packing-cases and incongruous furniture; several great pier-glasses, in which he beheld himself at various angles, like an actor on a stage; many pictures, framed and unframed, standing, with their faces to the wall; a fine Sheraton sideboard, a cabinet of marquetry, and a great old bed, with tapestry hangings. The windows opened to the floor; but by great good-fortune the lower part of the shutters had been closed, and this concealed him from the neighbors. Here, then, Markheim drew in a packing-case before the cabinet, and began to search among the keys. It was a long business, for there were many; and it was irksome besides; for, after all, there might be nothing in the cabinet, and time was on the wing. But the closeness of the occupation sobered him. With the tail of his eye he saw the door — even glanced at it from time to time directly, like a besieged commander pleased to verify the good estate of his defences. But in truth he was at peace. The rain falling in the street sounded natural and pleasant. Presently, on the other side, the notes of a piano were awakened to the music of a hymn, and the voices of many children took up the air and words. How stately, how comfortable was the melody! How fresh the youthful voices! Markheim gave ear to it, smilingly, as he sorted out the keys; and his mind was thronged with answerable ideas and images; church-going children and the pealing of the high organ; children afield, bathers by the brookside, ramblers on the brambly common, kite-fliers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky; and then, at another cadence of the hymn, back again to church, and the somnolence of summer Sundays, and the high genteel voice of the parson (which he smiled a little to recall) and the painted Jacobean tombs, and the dim lettering of the Ten Commandments in the chancel.

And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily, and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock clicked, and the door opened.

Fear held Markheim in a vice. What to expect he knew not, whether the dead man walking, or the official ministers of human justice, or some chance witness blindly stumbling in to consign him to the gallows. But when a face was thrust into the aperture, glanced round the room, looked at him, nodded and smiled as if in friendly recognition, and then withdrew again, and the door closed behind it, his fear broke loose from his control in a hoarse cry. At the sound of this the visitant returned.

"Did you call me?" he asked, pleasantly, and with that he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Markheim stood and gazed at him with all his eyes. Perhaps there was a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

film upon his sight, but the outlines of the new-comer seemed to change and waver like those of the idols in the wavering candle-light of the shop; and at times he thought he knew him; and at times he thought he bore a likeness to himself; and always, like a lump of living terror, there lay in his bosom the conviction that this thing was not of the earth and not of God.

And yet the creature had a strange air of the commonplace, as he stood looking on Markheim with a smile; and when he added: "You are looking for the money, I believe?" it was in the tones of everyday politeness.

Markheim made no answer.

"I should warn you," resumed the other, "that the maid has left her sweetheart earlier than usual and will soon be here. If Mr. Markheim be found in this house, I need not describe to him the consequences."

"You know me?" cried the murderer.

The visitor smiled. "You have long been a favorite of mine," he said; "and I have long observed and often sought to help you."

"What are you?" cried Markheim: "the devil?"

"What I may be," returned the other, "cannot affect the service I propose to render you."

"It can," cried Markheim; "it does! Be helped by you? No, never, not by you! You do not know me yet; thank God, you do not know me!"

"I know you," replied the visitant, with a sort of kind severity or rather firmness. "I know you to the soul."

"Know me!" cried Markheim. "Who can do so? My life is but a travesty and slander on myself. I have lived to belie my nature. All men do; all men are better than this disguise that grows about and stifles them. You see each dragged away by life, like one whom bravos have seized and muffled in a cloak. If they had their own control — if you could see their faces, they would be altogether different, they would shine out for heroes and saints! I am worse than most; my self is more overlaid; my excuse is known to me and God. But, had I the time, I could disclose myself."

"To me?" inquired the visitant.

"To you before all," returned the murderer. "I supposed you were intelligent. I thought — since you exist — you would prove a reader of the heart. And yet you would propose to judge me by my acts! Think of it; my acts! I was born and I have lived in a land of giants; giants have dragged me by the wrists since I was born out of my mother — the giants of circumstance. And you would judge me by my acts! But can you not look within? Can you not understand that evil is hateful to me? Can you not see within me the clear writing of conscience, never blurred by any wilful sophistry, although too often disregarded? Can you not read me for a thing that surely must be common as humanity — the unwilling sinner?"

"All this is very feelingly expressed," was the reply, "but it re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gards me not. These points of consistency are beyond my province, and I care not in the least by what compulsion you may have been dragged away, so as you are but carried in the right direction. But time flies; the servant delays, looking in the faces of the crowd and at the pictures on the boardings, but still she keeps moving nearer; and remember, it is as if the gallows itself was striding towards you through the Christmas streets! Shall I help you; I, who know all? Shall I tell you where to find the money?"

"For what price?" asked Markheim.

"I offer you the service for a Christmas gift," returned the other.

Markheim could not refrain from smiling with a kind of bitter triumph. "No," said he, "I will take nothing at your hands; if I were dying of thirst, and it was your hand that put the pitcher to my lips, I should find the courage to refuse. It may be credulous, but I will do nothing to commit myself to evil."

"I have no objection to a death-bed repentance," observed the visitant.

"Because you disbelieve their efficacy!" Markheim cried.

"I do not say so," returned the other; "but I look on these things from a different side, and when the life is done my interest falls. The man has lived to serve me, to spread black looks under color of religion, or to sow tares in the wheatfield, as you do, in a course of weak compliance with desire. Now that he draws so near to his deliverance, he can add but one act of service — to repent, to die, smiling, and thus to build up in confidence and hope the more timorous of my surviving followers. I am not so hard a master. Try me. Accept my help. Please yourself in life as you have done hitherto; please yourself more amply, spread your elbows at the board; and when the night begins to fall and the curtains to be drawn, I tell you, for your greater comfort, that you will find it even easy to compound your quarrel with your conscience, and to make a truckling peace with God. I came but now from such a death-bed, and the room was full of sincere mourners, listening to the man's last words: and when I looked into that face, which had been set as a flint against mercy, I found it smiling with hope."

"And do you, then, suppose me such a creature?" asked Markheim. "Do you think I have no more generous aspirations than to sin, and sin, and sin, and, at last, sneak into heaven? My heart rises at the thought. Is this, then, your experience of mankind? or is it because you find me with red hands that you presume such baseness? and is this crime of murder indeed so impious as to dry up the very springs of good?"

"Murder is to me no special category," replied the other. "All sins are murder, even as all life is war. I behold your race, like starving mariners on a raft, plucking crusts out of the hands of famine and feeding on each other's lives. I follow sins beyond the moment of their acting; I find in all that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

last consequence is death; and to my eyes, the pretty maid who thwarts her mother with such taking graces on a question of a ball, drips no less visibly with human gore than such a murderer as yourself. Do I say that I follow sins? I follow virtues also; they differ not by the thickness of a nail, they are both scythes for the reaping angel of Death. Evil, for which I live, consists not in action but in character. The bad man is dear to me; not the bad act, whose fruits, if we could follow them far enough down the hurtling cataract of the ages, might yet be found more blessed than those of the rarest virtues. And it is not because you have killed a dealer, but because you are Markheim that I offered to forward your escape."

"I will lay my heart open to you," answered Markheim. "This crime on which you find me is my last. On my way to it I have learned many lessons; itself is a lesson, a momentous lesson. Hitherto I have been driven with revolt to what I would not; I was a bondslave to poverty, driven and scourged. There are robust virtues that can stand in these temptations; mine was not so: I had a thirst for pleasure. But today, and out of this deed, I pluck both warning and riches — both the power and a fresh resolve to be myself. I become in all things a free actor in the world; I begin to see myself all changed, these hands the agents of good, this heart at peace. Something comes over me out of the past; something of what I have dreamed on Sabbath evenings to the sound of the church organ, of what I forecast when I shed tears over noble books, or talked, an innocent child, with my mother. There lies my life; I have wandered a few years, but now I see once more my city of destination."

"You are to use this money on the Stock Exchange, I think?" remarked the visitor; "and there, if I mistake not, you have already lost some thousands?"

"Ah," said Markheim, "but this time I have a sure thing."

"This time, again, you will lose," replied the visitor quietly.

"Ah, but I keep back the half!" cried Markheim.

"That also you will lose," said the other.

The sweat started upon Markheim's brow. "Well, then, what matter?" he exclaimed. "Say it be lost, say I am plunged again in poverty, shall one part of me, and that the worst, continue until the end to override the better? Evil and good run strong in me, haling me both ways. I do not love the one thing, I love all. I can conceive great deeds, renunciations, martyrdoms; and though I be fallen to such a crime as murder, pity is no stranger to my thoughts. I pity the the poor; who knows their trials better than myself? I pity and help them; I prize love, I love honest laughter; there is no good thing nor true thing on earth but I love it from my heart. And are my vices only to direct my life, and my virtues to lie without effect, like some passive lumber of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts."

But the visitant raised his finger. "For six-and-thirty years that you have been in this world," said he, "through many changes of fortune and varieties of humor, I have watched you steadily fall. Fifteen years ago you would have started at a theft. Three years back you would have blanched at the name of murder. Is there any crime, is there any cruelty or meanness, from which you still recoil — five years from now I shall detect you in the fact! Downward, downward, lies your way; nor can anything but death avail to stop you."

"It is true," Markheim said huskily, "I have in some degree compiled with evil. But it is so with all: the very saints, in the mere exercise of living, grow less dainty, and take on the tone of their surroundings."

"I will propound to you one simple question," said the other; "and as you answer, I shall read to you your moral horoscope. You have grown in many things more lax; possibly you do right to be so; and at any account, it is the same with all men. But granting that, are you in any one particular, however trifling, more difficult to please with your own conduct, or do you go in all things with a looser rein?"

"In any one?" repeated Markheim, with an anguish of consideration. "No," he added, with despair, "in none! I have gone down in all."

"Then," said the visitor, "content yourself with what you are, for you will never change; and the words of your part are irrevocably written."

Markheim stood for a long while silent, and indeed it was the visitor who first broke the silence. "That being so," he said, "shall I show you the money?"

"And grace?" cried Markheim.

"Have you not tried it?" returned the other. "Two or three years ago, did I not see you on the platform of revival meetings, and was not your voice the loudest in the hymn?"

"It is true," said Markheim; "and I see clearly what remains for me by way of duty. I thank you for these lessons from my soul; my eyes are opened, and I behold myself at last for what I am."

At this moment, the sharp note of the doorbell rang through the house; and the visitant, as though this were some concerted signal for which he had been waiting, changed at once in his demeanor.

"The maid!" he cried. "She has returned, as I forewarned you, and there is now before you one more difficult passage. Her master, you must say, is ill; you must let her in, with an assured but rather serious countenance — no smiles, no overacting, and I promise you success! Once the girl within, and the door closed, the same dexterity that has already rid you of the dealer will relieve you of this last danger in your path. Thenceforward you have the whole evening — the whole night, if needful — to ransack the treasures of the house and to make good your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

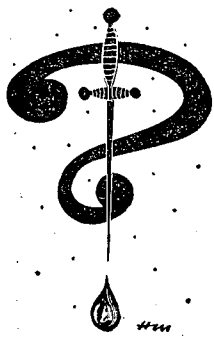
safety. This is help that comes to you with the mask of danger. Up!" he cried: "up, friend; your life hangs trembling in the scales: up, and act!"

Markheim steadily regarded his counsellor. "If I be condemned to evil acts," he said, "there is still one door of freedom open — I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet, by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all. My love of good is damned to barrenness; it may, and let it be! But I have still my hatred of evil; and from that, to your galling disappointment, you shall see that I can draw both energy and courage."

The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change: they brightened and softened with a tender triumph; and, even as they brightened, faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation. He opened the door and went downstairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chance-medley — a scene of defeat. Life, as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but on the further side he perceived a quiet heaven for his bark. He paused in the passage, and looked into the shop, where the candle still burned by the dead body. It was strangely silent. Thoughts of the dealer swarmed into his mind, as he stood gazing. And then the bell once more broke out into impatient clamor.

He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

"You had better go for the police," said he: "I have killed your master."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

$250.00 in Cash Prizes

You may recall that some years ago — nearly nine, unbelievable as it may sound! — we published three unfinished murder mysteries by Clayton Rawson, featuring his magician-manhunter, the Great Merlini; and that we awarded $250 in cash prizes for the best solutions sent in by readers of EQMM. Homicidal history now repeats itself: again we are giving you an unfinished Merlini murder mystery, and again we are making it the basis of a reader-participation contest. At the big moment in Mr. Rawson's new story — where the Great Merlini indicates that he knows who the murderer is — we stop the story and give you the chance to figure out the solution for yourself.

For the best solution to "Merlini and the Lie Detector" we offer a First Prize of $100, and for the 30 next best solutions, prizes of $5 each; in the case of ties, duplicate prizes will of course be awarded.

Solutions will be judged solely on merit — that is (1) on the accuracy of your solution, and (2) on the simplicity, clarity, and soundness of your answers to the questions at the end of Mr. Rawson's story. You may typewrite your solution or write it out in longhand — every submission from every reader of EQMM will have an equal chance to win the First Prize and all the other prizes. We guarantee that every entry will receive the personal consideration of the members of EQMM's editorial staff, who will act as a panel of judges; on the other hand, we cannot undertake to return any submissions, and the decision of the judges, it is agreed, will be accepted as final.

A few words about the ease or difficulty of this new Merlini mystery: we have asked the author, Clayton Rawson, to create his story with special care, and we think you will find it neither too difficult nor too easy to solve. In other words, you do not have to be a mastermind to deduce the correct answers, nor will you find it mere child's-play. Even more important, the correct solution is not complicated: the answers can be clearly stated in 100 words or less — indeed, we recommend that you limit your solution to 50-to-100 words.

In order to announce the names of the winners as quickly as possible, your answers must reach Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York, no later than July 25, 1955. This

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will permit us to publish the names of the winners in our October 1955 issue (on sale early in September 1955).

And now we invite you to make like an Armchair Detective . . . First, enjoy the new Merlini story; then, solve the mystery; and finally, write out and mail your solution.

Good luck to you all!

MERLINI AND THE LIE DETECTOR

by CLAYTON RAWSON

A CIRCLE OF ONLOOKERS CROWDED three deep around two men sitting at a table in the bar of the Overseas Press Club. One was a Police Inspector, the other a lean and nimble-fingered gentleman with a sardonic smile and a lively twinkle in his eye. The latter held a deck of playing cards in his right hand, and said, "This next demonstration shows how the dark powers of the occult might be used by up-to-date police departments. Inspector, please note and remember any one of these cards." The deck he held sprang suddenly to life as the cards arched through two feet of space, one following the other like well-trained seals into his left hand. "Did you choose one?"

Inspector Gavigan nodded, then reached for the deck. "I'll shuffle them," he said.

The Great Merlini smiled and gave him the deck. "A policeman's lot is not a trusting one." He lifted his empty highball glass. "This," he added, "once contained spirits. One — an invisible genie — may still remain. Let us see." His right hand reached into the air and a silver dollar appeared from nothing at his fingertips. He dropped it into the glass and then placed a saucer over its top. "Now give me ten or a dozen cards, with the one you chose among them. And watch the coin in the glass!"

Merlini took the cards and flipped the first one face up on the table. "Answer no to each question. Is this your card?"

Gavigan shook his head. "No."

Merlini dealt another and got another denial. On the sixth card, just as the Inspector said "No," the imprisoned coin, propelled by some invisible force, bounced into the air, turned over, and jingled in the glass.

"The genie says you lied just now," Merlini announced. "Is he right?"

Gavigan nodded, reaching for the saucer. Merlini lifted the glass, poured out the coin, flipped it into the air, caught it, and gave both the coin and glass to the Inspector. "No police department should be without them."

Through the ripple of applause a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman's voice asked eagerly, "Do you read palms too?"

Merlini shook his head. "No, but I sometimes see things in a crystal ball — or even in a glass of water."

"Will this do?" a reporter asked, placing his daiquiri on the table.

"That's harder," Merlini said. "The vision is often obscured by pink elephants. But I'll try." He leaned forward and stared intently into the liquid, and suddenly his face became solemn.

"I'm not going to play the straight man for this one," Gavigan said. "Excuse me." He rose and started for the bar. But he didn't get far.

Merlini's voice stopped him. "I see the motionless body of a man lying on the floor. Near his head is a silvery, shining statuette of a nude male figure holding a sword — an Academy Award Oscar. Its base is splotched with a dark wet stain . . ."

Gavigan spoke in spite of himself. "I'll call your bluff on that one," he said. "I've got a ten spot that says you can't tell where this dead man is."

The Great Merlini lifted the glass, swirled the liquid, and continued. "I see a street sign . . . Lexington and 44th Street. And now . . . an apartment building near the corner. On its marquee the numerals . . . five . . . three . . . five."

One of the reporters said, "What are we waiting for?" and the circle of onlookers melted.

Gavigan scowled after the departing newspapermen. "Okay," he said slowly. "So there is a body. You wouldn't let a practical joke backfire the way this one could if those reporters don't find one." His last words came back over his shoulder as he too made for the door.

Merlini drank the daiquiri, stood up, and followed. In the lobby outside he found Gavigan eyeing three wire-service teletype machines that clacked noisily and spewed forth long paper strips. "Crystal gazing, my eye!" Gavigan growled. "You got that flash here when you made a trip to the men's room a few minutes back."

"I plead guilty, Inspector," Merlini grinned. "These mechanical Delphic Oracles did help. But I saw something more. You're going to be paged any minute. It's an important murder. The victim is the movie and TV producer, Carl Todd."

The door to the street opened and Gavigan's driver entered right on cue. "Radio call for you, Inspector. Headquarters —"

"— reports a homicide at 535 East 44th," Gavigan said. "Let's go." The driver goggled.

"And who," Merlini asked as they went through the door, "is playing practical jokes now?"

From the walls of the den beyond the living room the photographs of many familiar movie faces looked down on Carl Todd's body. Behind a desk in one corner a filing cabinet, drawers half open, was surrounded by a snowfall of papers.

"We got two candidates for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Murder One rap," Lieutenant Malloy reported. "Todd's producing a TV spectacular, and when we get here we find his script writer and his female lead with the body. Each one accuses the other. I was just going to hear their stories together and see what kind of sparks we get."

Helen Lowe sat on the divan in slacks and a fur jacket. Opposite her, Don Sutton, in a gabardine raincoat, dabbed a pink-stained handkerchief across the four long scratches on his cheek.

"Let's have your story again, Miss Lowe," Malloy said. "We want to hear what Mr. Sutton thinks of it."

The girl was blonde and blue-eyed. Her soft clear voice held an undertone of desperation. "I was to meet Carl at six and after dinner here we were to drive my car up to Connecticut for the weekend. I was late. When I tried to leave the Broadway rehearsal hall at 50th Street, rain was coming down in sheets. The car was two blocks over and I'd have been soaked to the skin before I'd gone twenty feet. I waited there until it stopped just after six, and got here ten or twelve minutes later. I let myself in —"

"You have a key?" Gavigan asked.

"Yes. Carl and I —" she stopped, her eyes closed "— were to be married next month." Then, with an effort, she went on. "I saw his body beyond the door. I ran toward him. Just inside the den there was a man waiting, and he grabbed me. It was Don —"

Sutton stood up. His crew-cut bristled and his dark eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses flashed. "Please remember," he said in a tight voice, "that Miss Lowe is an actress — and a damned good one. She's lying in her teeth and she's doing it beautifully."

Helen moved gracefully and fast, crossing to face Sutton. "I had no reason to kill Carl! I loved him —"

Don shook his head. "That could be a reason, couldn't it? Had he found another girl? Did he tell you he was through? Or did you discover he'd been cheating —"

The slap she delivered to the side of his face rocked him. He grabbed her arms and shook her, shouting, "You can't get away with it, Helen! Tell them you killed him! Tell them —"

Malloy broke it up and Gavigan commanded, "That will be all of that! Sit down, both of you!" He faced Miss Lowe. "Sutton grabbed you as you came through the door. Then what?"

The girl's eyes remained on the script writer as she continued, "He said, 'Sorry, baby, but you shouldn't have come just now.' I thought he was going to kill me, too. I fought him and tried to get away. It was no good. Then he threw me into a chair and went to the phone there by the door. 'Maybe,' he said, 'your coming is a break after all.' He dialed the operator and told her to get the police. They got here a few minutes later."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Inspector turned to Sutton. "Okay. It's your turn."

Don spoke to the girl. "Take a bow, Helen. The acting and writing credits on that bit are both yours. And you only had a few minutes to put it together before air time. You did fine." He looked at Gavigan. "Following her act is tough, but I'll try. I worked all day on script changes which Carl wanted to have before he left for the weekend. I finished at six and started downtown."

"In that rainstorm?" Malloy asked.

"Yes, but my car was close by and I ran for it. It was a bit like driving a submarine the first few blocks, but at 60th Street it stopped as suddenly as if some stagehand had turned it off. I managed to find a parking space four blocks over — on 40th — and walked from there. I had just reached Carl's door when it opened and Helen walked out."

"You're not a bad actor yourself, Don," Helen cut in. "Or, rather, you are."

Sutton ignored that. "She left the door wide open behind her and walked past me as though I weren't there. She didn't answer when I spoke. She moved like a sleepwalker — staring straight ahead. I don't think she saw me at all. I stepped inside, saw Carl's body, then hightailed it down the hall and caught her at the elevator. It just happens that I told a few people at rehearsal yesterday what I thought of Carl Todd. I didn't say anything nice. So I didn't care to be found here with his body. I grabbed her — that part of her story is right — and pulled her back in here. It wasn't easy." He ran his fingers over the scratches on his cheek. "Her fingernails are sharp . . . Then I called the police."

"Got anything that corroborates either story?" Gavigan asked Malloy.

"Not yet. Miss Lowe can't give me anyone who saw her waiting for the rain to stop, so she could have left the rehearsal hall earlier than she claims. Sutton's a bachelor and leaving earlier goes for him, too. We haven't found anyone who saw either of them enter this building, and the elevator is self-service."

Gavigan scowled, then marched back into the den to stand again over the body. Merlini and the Lieutenant followed.

"They both say the rain stopped just after six," the magician said. "Anybody check that?"

"We did," Malloy said. "The Weather Bureau says it was 6:05 on the dot."

The Inspector looked at Merlini. "He doesn't miss much, does he?"

"I don't need an engraved diploma from the Police Academy," Merlini answered, "to notice that when Todd saw the blow coming, he raised his arm and got his wrist watch smashed. Since it reads 6:01, he was killed before the rain stopped."

"The one who got here first is the liar," Malloy said.

"Merlini," Gavigan said suddenly, "does that lie detector trick you did tonight ever miss?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Great Merlini smiled. "No. But the method won't work in this situation. I have a hunch, however, that there is an impromptu mechanical lie detector available to us and that it is hand-tailored for this case."

"Okay, wheel it out."

"I can't do that. It's downstairs. Bring your two suspects along and we'll try it. I won't guarantee anything, but we might have the answer in five minutes."

Don Sutton and Helen Lowe, escorted by Malloy and another detective, followed Merlini and Inspector Gavigan. The magician stopped by the bright-yellow Cadillac that Miss Lowe said was hers. It was neatly parked in front of a fire hydrant.

"Your keys, please, Miss Lowe," Merlini said. "I'll drive."

"Just a minute," Gavigan objected. "Where are we going?"

"Fortieth Street. Come on. You and Miss Lowe up front with me." Merlini got behind the wheel.

When the others were in, he put the key in the ignition switch and turned it. The motor started at once, purring softly like a contented cat. Merlini sat motionless for a second or two, watching a fly amble leisurely down across the windshield. Then he set the Hydramatic lever at Drive, released the brake, pressed the gas pedal, and the car pulled out smoothly.

A moment later, the car radio came to life — a band playing the last bars of *Stormy Weather*. The syrupy voice of an announcer trying hard to sound like Arthur Godfrey followed. "Did you get wet feet during that cloudburst? Do you want to avoid the sniffles tomorrow? Then rush out and get —"

The Inspector twisted the volume control, cutting him off.

A few minutes later the magician double-parked beside Sutton's green Plymouth on 40th Street. "All passengers change at this junction. Keys please."

Sutton handed them over.

Again Merlini sat behind the wheel, put the key in the switch, his foot on the gas. He hesitated briefly, then twisted the key. The engine purred just as smoothly as the other had done.

Gavigan, watching Merlini, turned his head and stared with the magician at the windshield.

"As an impromptu lie detector, does that tell you who arrived first?" Merlini asked.

"Yes," Gavigan agreed. "We make the arrest now."

What was the lie detector that told Merlini and Gavigan which of the two suspects was lying? And how did it prove which one killed Todd?

Mail your solution at once to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York . . . $250 in cash prizes for the 31 best solutions! Remember, the deadline is July 25th.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another detective-crime story complete on one page!

KILLERS THREE: (2) *The Letter*

by FREDRIC BROWN

LAVERTY STEPPED THROUGH THE OPEN French window and crossed the carpet silently until he stood behind the man working at the desk.

"Hello, Congressman," he snarled.

Congressman Quinn turned and then rose shakily as he saw the revolver pointing at him. "Laverty," he said. "Don't be a fool."

"I told you I'd do this some day," he said. "And I've waited four years. It's safe, now."

"No, Laverty, you won't get away with it. I left a letter — a letter to be delivered in case I'm ever killed."

"Nuts. You wouldn't dare write such a letter. You couldn't have — not without incriminating yourself. Why, you wouldn't *want* me tried and convicted — that would bring out the truth and blacken your name forever."

"But — "

Laverty pulled the trigger six times.

He went back to his car, drove over a bridge to rid himself of the murder weapon, then home to his apartment. He went to bed and slept peacefully.

Until his doorbell rang. He slipped into a bathrobe, went to the door and opened it.

His heart stood still, and stayed that way. His body fell.

The man who had rung Laverty's doorbell had been shocked; but he had shown presence of mind and had done the right thing under the circumstances. He had stepped over Laverty's body into the apartment and had used Laverty's phone to call police emergency. And had waited.

Now, Laverty having been pronounced dead by the emergency squad, the man was being questioned by a lieutenant of police.

"Your name?" the lieutenant asked.

"Babcock. Henry Babcock. I had a letter to deliver to Mr. Laverty. This letter."

The lieutenant took it from his hand, hesitated a moment, then opened and unfolded it. "Why, it's just a blank sheet of paper!"

"I don't know about that, Lieutenant. My boss, Congressman Quinn, gave me that letter some time ago. My orders were to deliver it to Laverty right away if anything unusual ever happened to Congressman Quinn. So when the radio said —"

"Yes, I know. He was found murdered late this evening. What kind of work did you do for him?"

"Well, it was a secret, but I don't suppose the secret matters now. I used to take his place for a lot of unimportant speeches and meetings he wanted to avoid. I'm his double."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In SAILOR ON HORSEBACK, *his distinguished biography of Jack London, Irving Stone made the statement that the publication of Jack London's first book —* THE SON OF THE WOLF: TALES OF THE FAR NORTH *(1900) — marked the true beginning of the modern American short story. Now, this is a canny judgment on Mr. Stone's part, and to support it he reminded his readers that the American short story had its "antecedents in Edgar Allan Poe, Bret Harte, Stephen Crane, and Ambrose Bierce, who had all broken with the conventional pattern to write authentic literature." But it was Jack London, according to Mr. Stone, who was the first American writer "to bring the short story home to the common people."*

It is a cogent argument. In partial proof, we now give you the sixth in our series of Jack London's short stories of crime and detection. While this tale dates back more than 40 years, you will find its vitality still undiminished, its daring — the breaking away from conventional literary patterns — still impressive. "Make Westing" deals with a phase in American history notorious for its cruelty and brutality — the old sailing-ship days — and, in typical Jack London style, the story pulls no punches whatever. It is tough and hard, and in that sense might be said to have anticipated another American school of writing — the hardboiled.

MAKE WESTING

by JACK LONDON

FOR SEVEN WEEKS THE MARY ROGERS had been between 50° south in the Atlantic and 50° south in the Pacific, which meant that for seven weeks she had been struggling to round Cape Horn. For seven weeks she had been either in dirt, or close to dirt, save once, and then, following upon six days of excessive dirt, which she had ridden out under the shelter of the redoubtable Tierra Del Fuego coast, she had almost gone ashore during a heavy swell in the dead calm that had suddenly fallen. For seven weeks she had wrestled with the Cape Horn graybeards and in return been buffeted and smashed by them. She was a wooden ship and her ceaseless straining had opened her seams, so that twice a day the watch took its turn at the pumps.

The *Mary Rogers* was strained, the crew was strained, and big Dan Cullen, master, was likewise strained. Perhaps he was strained most of all, for upon him rested the responsibility of that

Reprinted from WHEN GOD LAUGHS, *copyright, 1911, by the Macmillan Company; renewed*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

titanic struggle. He slept most of the time in his clothes, though he rarely slept. He haunted the deck at night, a great, burly, robust ghost, black with the sunburn of 30 years of sea and hairy as an orangutan. He, in turn, was haunted by one thought of action, a sailing direction for the Horn: *Whatever you do, make westing! Make westing!* It was an obsession. He thought of nothing else except, at times, to blaspheme God for sending such bitter weather.

Make westing! He hugged the Horn, and a dozen times lay hove-to with the iron Cape bearing east-by-north, or north-north-east, a score of miles away. And each time the eternal west wind smote him back and he made easting. He fought gale after gale, south to 64°, inside the antarctic drift-ice, and pledged his immortal soul to the Powers of Darkness for a bit of westing, for a slant to take him around. And he made easting. In despair, he had tried to make the passage through the Straits of Le Maire. Halfway through, the wind hauled to the north'ard of northwest, the glass dropped to 28.88, and he turned and ran before a gale of cyclonic fury, missing by a hair's-breadth piling up on the black-toothed rocks. Twice he had made west to the Diego Ramirez Rocks, one of the times saved between two snow squalls by sighting the grave-stones of ships a quarter of a mile dead ahead.

Blow! Captain Dan Cullen instanced all his 30 years at sea to prove that never had it blown so before. The *Mary Rogers* was hove to at the time he gave the evidence; and, to clinch it, inside half an hour the *Mary Rogers* was hove down to the hatches. Her new maintopsail and brand new spencer were blown away like tissue paper; and five sails, furled and fast under double gaskets, were blown loose and stripped from the yards. And before morning the *Mary Rogers* was hove down twice again, and holes were knocked in her bulwarks to ease her decks from the weight of ocean that pressed her down.

On an average of once a week Captain Dan Cullen caught glimpses of the sun. Once, for ten minutes, the sun shone at midday, and ten minutes afterward a new gale was piping up, both watches were shortening sail, and all was buried in the obscurity of a driving snow squall. Once, for a fortnight, Captain Dan Cullen was without a meridian or a chronometer sight. Rarely did he know his position within half a degree except when in sight of land; for sun and stars remained hidden behind the sky, and it was so gloomy that even at best the horizons were poor for accurate observations.

A gray gloom shrouded the world. The clouds were gray; the great driving seas were leaden gray; the smoking crests were a gray churning; even the occasional albatrosses were gray, while the snow flurries were not white, but gray, under the somber pall of the heavens.

And life on board the *Mary Rogers*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was gray — gray and gloomy. The faces of the sailors were blue-gray; they were afflicted with sea-cuts and sea-boils, and they suffered exquisitely. They were shadows of men. For seven weeks, in the forecastle or on deck, they had not known what it was to be dry. They had forgotten what it was to sleep out a watch; and all watches it was, "All hands on deck!" They caught snatches of agonized sleep, and they slept in their oilskins ready for the everlasting call. So weak and worn were they that it took both watches to do the work of one. Nothing less than a broken leg enabled a man to knock off work; and there were two such, who had been mauled and pulped by the seas that broke aboard.

One other man who was the shadow of a man was George Dorety. He was the only passenger on board, a friend of the firm, and he had elected to make the voyage for his health. But seven weeks of Cape Horn had not bettered his health. He gasped and panted in his bunk through the long, heaving nights; and when on deck he was so bundled up for warmth that he resembled a peripatetic old-clothes shop. At midday, eating at the cabin table in a gloom so deep that the swinging sea-lamps burned always, Dorety looked as blue-gray as the sickest, saddest man for'ard. Nor did gazing across the table at Captain Dan Cullen have any cheering effect upon him. Captain Cullen chewed and scowled and kept silent, and with every chew he reiterated the sole thought of his existence, which was *make westing*. The sight of the big, hairy brute was not stimulating to George Dorety's appetite. Captain Cullen looked upon Dorety as a Jonah and told him so once each meal.

Nor did the mate provide first-aid to a languid appetite. Joshua Higgins by name, a seaman by profession but a pot-walloper by capacity, the mate was a loose-jointed, sniffling creature, heartless and selfish and cowardly, without a soul, in fear of his life from Dan Cullen and a bully over the sailors. In that wild weather at the southern end of the earth, Joshua Higgins ceased washing. His grimy face at table turned George Dorety's stomach. Ordinarily this lavatorial dereliction would have caught Captain Cullen's eye and stimulated his vocabulary; but the Captain's mind was filled with making westing, to the exclusion of all things not contributory thereto.

Later on, when 50° south in the Pacific had been reached, Joshua Higgins would wash his face very abruptly. In the meantime, at the cabin table, where gray twilight alternated with lamplight while the lamps were being filled, George Dorety sat between the two men, one a tiger and the other a hyena, and wondered why God had made them.

The second mate, Matthew Turner, was a true sailor and a man, but George Dorety did not have the solace of his company, for Turner ate by himself when they had finished.

On Saturday morning, July 24,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

George Dorety awoke to a feeling of life and headlong movement. On deck he found the *Mary Rogers* running off before a howling southeaster. Nothing was set but the lower topsails and the foresail. It was all she could stand, yet she was making fourteen knots, as Mr. Turner shouted in Dorety's ear when he came on deck. And it was all westing. She was going around the Horn at last . . . if the wind held. Mr. Turner looked happy. The end of the struggle was in sight.

But Captain Cullen did not look happy. He scowled at Dorety in passing. Captain Cullen did not want God to know that he was pleased with that wind. He had a conception of a malicious God and believed in his secret soul that, if God knew it was a desirable wind, God would promptly efface it and send a snorter from the west. So he walked softly before God, smothering his joy down under scowls, and so fooling God; for God was the only thing in the universe of which Dan Cullen was afraid.

All Saturday and Saturday night the *Mary Rogers* raced her westing. Persistently she logged her fourteen knots, so that by Sunday morning she had covered 350 miles. If the wind held, she would make around. If it failed, and the snorter came from anywhere between southwest and north, back the *Mary Rogers* would be hurled, no better off than she had been seven weeks before.

And on Sunday morning the wind *was* failing. The big sea was going down and running smooth. Both watches were on deck setting sail after sail as fast as the ship could stand it. And now Captain Cullen went around brazenly before God, smoking a big cigar, smiling jubilantly, as if the failing wind delighted him, while down underneath he was raging against God for taking the life out of the blessed wind.

Make westing! So he would, if God would only leave him alone. Secretly, he pledged himself anew to the Powers of Darkness, if they would let him make westing. He pledged himself so easily because he did not believe in the Powers of Darkness. He thought he believed only in God. He did not know that in his inverted theology God was really the Prince of Darkness. Captain Cullen was a devil-worshiper, but he called the devil by another name, that was all.

At midday, after calling eight bells, Captain Cullen ordered the royals on. The men went aloft faster than they had gone in weeks. Not alone were they nimble because of the westing, but a benignant sun was shining down and limbering their stiff bodies. George Dorety stood aft, near Captain Cullen, less bundled in clothes than usual, soaking in the grateful warmth as he watched the scene. Swiftly and abruptly the incident occurred. There was a cry from the foreroyal-yard of "Man overboard!" Somebody threw a lifebuoy over the side, and at the same instant the second mate's voice came aft, ringing and peremptory:

"Hard down your helm!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man at the wheel never moved a spoke. He knew better, for Captain Dan Cullen was standing alongside of him. He wanted to move a spoke, to move all the spokes, to grind the wheel down, hard down, for his comrade drowning in the sea. He glanced at Captain Dan Cullen, and Captain Dan Cullen gave no sign.

"Down! Hard down!" the second mate roared as he sprang aft.

But he ceased springing and commanding, he stood still when he saw Captain Cullen by the wheel. And big Dan Cullen puffed at his cigar and said nothing. Astern, and going astern fast, could be seen the sailor. He had caught the lifebuoy and was clinging to it. Nobody spoke. Nobody moved. The men aloft clung to the royal yards and watched with terror-stricken faces. And the *Mary Rogers* raced on, making her westing. A long, silent minute passed.

"Who was it?" Captain Cullen demanded.

"Mops, sir," eagerly answered the sailor at the wheel.

Mops topped a wave astern and disappeared temporarily in the trough. It was a large wave, but it was no graybeard. A small boat could live easily in such a sea, and in such a sea the *Mary Rogers* could easily come to. But she could not come to and make westing at the same time.

For the first time in all his years George Dorety was seeing a real drama of life and death — a sordid little drama in which the scales balanced an unknown sailor named Mops against a few miles of longitude. At first he had watched the man astern, but now he watched big Dan Cullen, hairy and black, vested with power of life and death, smoking a cigar.

Captain Dan Cullen smoked another long, silent minute. Then he removed the cigar from his mouth. He glanced aloft at the spars of the *Mary Rogers*, and overside at the sea.

"Sheet home the royals!" he cried.

Fifteen minutes later they sat at table, in the cabin, with food served before them. On one side of George Dorety sat Dan Cullen, the tiger, on the other side, Joshua Higgins, the hyena. Nobody spoke. On deck the men were sheeting home the skysails. George Dorety could hear their cries, while a persistent vision haunted him of a man called Mops, alive and well, clinging to a lifebuoy miles astern in that lonely ocean. He glanced at Captain Cullen and experienced a feeling of nausea, for the man was eating his food with relish, almost bolting it.

"Captain Cullen," Dorety said, "you are in command of this ship, and it is not proper for me to comment now upon what you do. But I wish to say one thing. There is a hereafter, and yours will be a hot one."

Captain Cullen did not even scowl. In his voice was regret as he said: "It was blowing a living gale. It was impossible to save the man."

"He fell from the royal-yard," Dorety cried hotly. "You were setting the royals at the time. Fifteen minutes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afterward you were setting the skysails."

"It was a living gale, wasn't it, Mr. Higgins?" Captain Cullen said, turning to the mate.

"If you'd brought her to, it'd have taken the sticks out of her," was the mate's answer. "You did the proper thing, Captain Cullen. The man hadn't a ghost of a show."

George Dorety made no answer, and to the meal's end no one spoke. After that, Dorety had his meals served in his stateroom. Captain Cullen scowled at him no longer, though no speech was exchanged between them, while the *Mary Rogers* sped north toward warmer latitudes. At the end of the week, Dan Cullen cornered Dorety on deck.

"What are you going to do when we get to 'Frisco?" he demanded bluntly.

"I am going to swear out a warrant for your arrest," Dorety answered quietly. "I am going to charge you with murder, and I am going to see you hanged for it."

"You're almighty sure of yourself," Captain Cullen sneered, turning on his heel.

A second week passed, and one morning found George Dorety standing in the coach-house companionway at the for'ard end of the long poop, taking his first gaze around the deck. The *Mary Rogers* was reaching full-and-by, in a stiff breeze. Every sail was set and drawing, including the staysails. Captain Cullen strolled for'ard along the poop. He strolled carelessly, glancing at the passenger out of the corner of his eye. Dorety was looking the other way, standing with head and shoulders outside the companionway, and only the back of his head was to be seen. Captain Cullen, with swift eye, embraced the mainstaysail-block and the head and estimated the distance. He glanced about him. Nobody was looking. Aft, Joshua Higgins, pacing up and down, had just turned his back and was going the other way.

Captain Cullen bent over suddenly and cast the staysail-sheet off from its pin. The heavy block hurtled through the air, smashing Dorety's head like an eggshell and hurtling on and back and forth as the staysail whipped and slatted in the wind. Joshua Higgins turned around to see what had carried away, and met the full blast of the vilest portion of Captain Cullen's profanity.

"I made the sheet fast myself," whimpered the mate in the first lull, "with an extra turn to make sure. I remember it distinctly."

"Made fast?" the Captain snarled back for the benefit of the watch, as it struggled to capture the flying sail before it tore to ribbons. "You couldn't make your grandmother fast, you useless hell's scullion! If you made that sheet fast with an extra turn, why in hell didn't it stay fast? That's what I want to know. Why in hell didn't it stay fast?"

The mate whined inarticulately.

"Oh, shut up!" were the final words of Captain Cullen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Half an hour later he was as surprised as any when the body of George Dorety was found inside the companionway on the floor. In the afternoon, alone in his room, he doctored up the log.

"*Ordinary seaman, Karl Brun,*" he wrote, "*lost overboard from foreroyal-yard in a gale of wind. Was running at the time, and for the safety of the ship did not dare come up to the wind. Nor could a boat have lived in the sea that was running.*"

On another page, he wrote:

"*Had often warned Mr. Dorety about the danger he ran because of his carelessness on deck. I told him, once, that some day he would get his head knocked off by a block. A carelessly fastened mainstaysail sheet was the cause of the accident, which was deeply to be regretted because Mr. Dorety was a favorite with all of us.*"

Captain Dan Cullen read over his literary effort with admiration, blotted the page, and closed the log. He lighted a cigar and stared before him. He felt the *Mary Rogers* lift and heel and surge along, and knew that she was making nine knots. A smile of satisfaction slowly dawned on his black and hairy face. Well, anyway, he had made his westing and fooled God.

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly paced mystery thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "Killer in the Straw" (formerly "Death and the Gentle Bull"), by Richard and Frances Lockridge. "One of the Lockridges' best," reports *Frances Crane* in the San Francisco *News.*

A BESTSELLER MYSTERY — "The Case of the Missing Corpse" (formerly "Death of a Corinthian"), by Edwin Lanham. Abridged edition. ". . . excellent . . ." says the *Saturday Review.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "Payoff in Blood" (formerly "Rocks and Ruin"), by Hal Jason Calin. ". . . good action . . ." comments the *Saturday Review.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Convicting the guilty is only half of a detective's job. The other half is just as important.

THE MAN WITHOUT AN ENEMY

by JOHN and WARD HAWKINS

JAMES EASTER WATCHED HER COME out of her cell, the night matron at her side. She walked like a wooden doll. Her hair was mussed and her skirt was badly wrinkled. She'd had no sleep, no rest. Eight hours in jail — 10 P.M. till 6 A.M. — and she was scared to death.

"In here, Miss Wood," James Easter said.

There was a table against one wall of the interrogation room, littered with coffee cartons, paper cups, and ashtrays. There were several straight chairs. A plainclothesman, Barney Shea, was waiting stolidly. He had stubble on his jaw and his eyes were sooty with fatigue.

"If you'll sit down, Miss Wood," Easter said, his voice impersonal.

In ten years of police work, never a neighbor, never a girl he'd known had turned up in the net — till now. She was twenty-four or five. Her hair and her eyes were dark. She had good bones, good features, a generous mouth.

Easter said, "It's time you told us the truth."

"I have." Her voice was faint. "Honestly, I have."

"Don't start that again," Shea said.

A matron sat in the corner, heavy-eyed and half asleep. She was here because the rules said she must be. James Easter sighed. He was tall and pleasantly homely, with red hair and warm blue eyes. He wished he were anywhere but here.

"You say you were playing cards with Hamilton in your living room," he said. "You went into the kitchen to fix a snack tray. You heard a noise and came back and found Hamilton on the floor? With an ice pick in his throat?"

She swallowed hard. "Yes."

He led her through the rest of it again, patiently. Mr. Hamilton had not been a well man; her first thought had been of heart attack and she'd gone to the bathroom for a cold towel. She'd knelt to wipe Hamilton's face. She'd seen the blood and the ice pick then. And screamed.

"The neighbors say you quarreled often."

"Not really. He liked to well — yell when he was playing cards. Shouting seemed to make the game more important."

Shea said, "Then try tellin' the truth for a change."

Shea was a journeyman, rough and

Copyright, 1952, by United Newspapers Magazine Corp.; originally titled "Girl in Trouble"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capable. Easter let him pound away at her, not really listening. Pictures floated in his weary mind. Time-blurred snapshots of this girl who had lived next door: Susie Wood, thin and intense and very serious. An awkward child, skinned knees, and braces on her teeth, hanging a May basket full of cookies and wilted blooms on his doorknob.

She had been a lonely little squirt; lost and sad as a puppy without a home. Still lost, he told himself. The way it looks right now, really lost and gone. "How come Hamilton was in your place so much?" Shea asked.

"I told you," she said. "He was sick and all alone. He liked to play cribbage and talk."

"We heard about the bees and flowers."

"Miss Wood," Easter said. "You didn't go to the door? You didn't look outside?"

"I — I think I fainted," Susan Wood said.

"We talked to everyone who lived in the court," Easter said. "No suspicious characters."

"There was someone. I — didn't do it."

"Look." Shea's voice was blunt. "Somebody steps in, kills Hamilton, steps out. You don't see this guy. Nobody sees him. You know why? He's the little man who wasn't there." Shea's scowl deepened. "What really happened is you put the ice pick in him. Then you screamed."

"No!" Susan Wood said. "That isn't true."

"We dug into this Howard Hamilton," Shea said. "He had an income, not real big, but enough. Not many friends, but not an enemy."

Easter said, "Murder is not done without reason. If we believe you, there's got to be someone in Hamilton's background who hated him a lot, or stood to profit by his death. Do you know anyone who wanted Hamilton dead?"

"No. He was the kindest man I ever met."

In the mid-morning Easter broke it up, sending Susan Wood back to her cell. Barney Shea made no effort to hide his disgust. "How come the kid gloves?" he asked sourly. "It looks to me like you're takin' real good care of that little friend of yours." He took his hat and stalked out of the room as another detective, Fred Keeney, came in.

Keeney said, "Jim, there's a guy in the line-up this morning you ought to get a look at just so you'll remember the face."

They went to the darkened line-up room. Down front, on the small and harshly lighted stage, stood a gray, soiled man, but it wasn't the man Keeney wanted Jim to see.

While they were waiting Keeney said, "Jim, you get to be Barney's and my age, it's not good to see men with maybe half your time promoted over your head. Barney Shea wanted the job you got. He don't like you much."

"It's pretty obvious," Easter said.

"He's waiting for you to make a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mistake. This one might be it, because it's got somebody you know in the fire. That happens to all of us, Jim. It happened to me the third day I was in plain clothes. A lad I'd run around with was tagged. There wasn't anybody goin' to be able to say he'd got a break because I'd known him when. I had a job to do, see? I got him six months in jail."

An owlish drunk crossed the line-up stage.

"Turned out I was wrong," Keeney said. "But it taught me something. You gotta do the job."

The wall speakers said, "Frank Boccicho, alias Frankie Boom."

"This is the guy," Keeney said.

A slender man was facing the harsh downpour of light. A colorless, unsmiling man, completely at ease up there on the line-up stage. Frank Boccicho, specialist. Frankie Boom, executioner, had been around a long time. He knew his trade. He had been indicted often, convicted never.

"We got nothing on him," Keeney said. "He'll walk out as free as air." He shook his head. "That kid upstairs, that Susan Wood, ain't goin' any place. It makes a man wonder."

It was late afternoon, warm and windless, and Easter drove alone down a quiet street of small homes, stores, and court apartments. He was still tired. Three hours sleep, a shower, a change of clothes had not helped much. At a stop light he checked the address he wanted — 2834 Flamingo.

Vista Court was a low brick structure built around a square of lawn. Easter went past Number Six, Susan Wood's apartment, to knock on other doors. "Knew Hamilton well," the manager said. "Nice guy, paid his bills." He talked to a woman whose child clung to her skirt. "He was a sweet old man," she said.

Easter left the court, a picture of Hamilton in his pocket. "A good customer," a clerk in the grocery told him. He took the picture into a corner bar. "Knew him well," the barman said. "One beer a day — no more, no less. Everybody liked him."

"Thanks," Easter said.

He went back to Vista Court. He unlocked Number Six and walked into the room where Howard Hamilton had died. "The man without an enemy," Easter mused.

He stood before the window, thinking now of Susan Wood. There were two sets of images in his mind: Susie Wood, skinned knees and braces, riding that beat-up bike of hers, braids flying. And Susan Wood saying, "He was the kindest man I ever met."

Easter walked through the apartment: combination living and dining room, tiny kitchen, bedroom, and bath. The apartment had much to say of Susan Wood. The books, the prints on the walls, the clothes in the uncluttered closets and bureau drawers — these were exactly the books and prints and clothes of the lonely girl grown-up.

"Well? Did she or didn't she?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Until now, he had been thinking like a cop. Like Barney Shea. Find the motive and you've found the killer. Never mind the human element; deal with facts. Hamilton had no enemies, no one had gained by his death — facts. Susan Wood had lived alone, she had entertained Hamilton often, the neighbors had heard them quarreling — facts. Put them together and they outlined a story as old as time. Barney Shea was working hard at filling it in.

Let Easter work at something else, let him think like an old friend, a neighbor. Could Susan Wood, could this girl, this woman put an ice pick in a man's throat? The answer came at once: No. He was glad that he was sure of it.

But where did it get him? The girl had not killed Hamilton — fact. But he was dead — fact. Killed by someone who had not gained — fact. A new set of circumstances, a new picture. . .

An hour later he was following a matron down a white-washed corridor to Susan's cell, a small suitcase in his hand. He had a smile for Susan Wood as she stood uncertainly at the barred door. She was still pale, still afraid.

"Mr. Easter. . ."

"Jim," he said. "I brought you some clothes, Susie. Maybe I got the right stuff, maybe not."

"Thank you . . . very much."

"No trouble. I had to go out that way." He wanted to comfort her. She looked so damned forlorn, so lost. "One question," he said. "Did Hamilton ever mention anyone he'd had trouble with? Think hard, Susie."

She shook her head. "Never."

"I believe you." He could say that much.

Barney Shea and Fred Keeney were waiting for him in a small second-floor office.

"Barney," Easter said. "You checked Vista Court. See anyone who looked like Hamilton?"

"No," Barney said. "Why?"

"Say the girl is innocent. Believe she is."

Shea made a sound of ridicule.

"Try it for size," Easter said. "She didn't kill him — hang onto that. He had no enemies, nobody made a nickel out of his death. He shouldn't have been murdered, but he was. Why?"

"Bright boy got the answer?" Shea asked.

"I think so. He was the *wrong* guy."

Barney Shea choked. "You gone nuts?"

"Maybe," Easter said. "But it could happen. Hamilton wasn't killed in his own place. Somebody saw him go into the girl's apartment. It was dark, the lights aren't much. The killer got only a quick look at him. Hamilton sat with his back to the door. The ice pick was planted from behind."

Barney Shea was very interested. "Okay," he said. "You're in charge of this detail. How d'you want to handle it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Quietly," Easter said.

He knew why Barney Shea was interested. They all made reports to the captain. If the idea went sour, Barney's report would be as final as the ice pick. He'd say, "Easter wanted the girl out from under. They're old friends, y'know. Killed by mistake — what some guys won't dream up to make a score with a cutie." Jim Easter would be back in uniform, pounding a beat.

"Let's get at it," Easter said.

He divided the work. Fred Keeney talked to the tenants of Vista Court, checking for possible visitors who might resemble Howard Hamilton. Shea drifted through the markets, stores, and bars. Easter took the park where the lights blazed over checker tables, horseshoe and shuffleboard courts. He was still there when Keeney came across the lawn. "No luck," Keeney said. "You?"

"The place is full of old boys," Easter said. "So far I haven't seen one I'd mistake for Hamilton."

Barney Shea was waiting beside the car, trying to hide a hard smile. Barney said, "I gave it the works. Didn't find anything."

"Let's travel," Easter said.

He rode in the back seat as Barney took the police sedan down the boulevard. The supermarket was closed now. Vista Court was a block beyond the store, and its blue neon told the passer-by this was 2834 Flamingo. Another court appeared as they paused for a stop street, then rolled on. A third court appeared, then a fourth.

"Barney," Easter said. "Turn this hack around. Go out to that supermarket, turn and head downtown again. This time take it slow."

They turned in the parking lot of the darkened market. They passed Vista Court, moving slowly. The second court was a white stucco job. The third was brick.

"This'll do," Easter said. "C'mon, Fred."

They went up the walk. "I'll do the talking," Easter said, and rang the manager's bell. He smiled at the stout man who opened the door. "I'm looking for a man I met in the park the other day. He asked me to drop in. I've forgotten his name. He's fifty-five or sixty, on the thin side, with gray hair and blue eyes."

"Mr. Washburn," the manager said. "Number Eight."

They walked around the square of lawn, Fred Keeney swearing softly. "I'm hoping, Jim."

He stood in the shadow while Easter rang the bell. The lock rasped and the door opened as far as the night chain would permit. "Yes?" a voice said. The man's face was brown, his eyes were blue, his hair was a silvery gray. He was not Hamilton's twin, and yet the same words described them both.

"I'm looking for a Mr. Peters," Easter said.

"Not here. Never heard of him."

Easter said, "Sorry I troubled you."

When they reached the car Fred Keeney spoke to Barney. "This guy fits the part," he said. "Describe him,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or pick him off a bum photograph, and you could call him Hamilton."

"Yeah?" Barney's smile was smaller now. "But how're you going to tie this guy to our job?"

"Wait," Fred said slowly, "I've seen that guy's picture in the files. His name begins — I think — with K."

"Uh-huh," Easter said, and pointed to the building. "Look at that number."

Shea said, "2438 — what about it?"

"Vista Court's 2834," Easter said. "These are the same numbers, transposed. Both signs are blue neon. And both places are brick. A mistake could be made."

"Okay," Shea said. "Prove it."

Slowly, Easter said, "I like this guy for it. He was scared when we rang. As if he was expecting someone he didn't want to see."

"Maybe and maybe not," Shea said.

"But we'll work with it a while. Fred, it could be you're right — he's got a record. Try remembering hard. Grab a cab and check the pictures downtown. Barney and I'll stand by here until we hear from you."

Easter and Barney circled the block and came back to park a little way from the court entrance. "Back door opens on a dead-end alley," Easter said. "Anybody going in or out will have to pass close enough to give us a look at them."

"You've got something — I give you that. It could mean something, it could mean nothing." Shea paused and then said surprisingly, "How much d'yuh like that girl?"

"I don't know," Easter said. "I knew her as a kid. I haven't seen her since, until this came up."

"Maybe you're gone on her?"

Easter thought of that white, drawn face and knew it was more than possible. "What's it to you, Barney?"

"We haven't got her cold," Shea said. "Not without a confession. If she sticks with her story that somebody else killed him, and a cop, say — backs her up some, she's got a chance of beating it. As long as we never catch this here other guy, there's a reasonable doubt. She might not get loose, but she won't get first degree."

"That's right, Barney," Easter said.

And it *was* right. It was something to think about. A girl whom you might love — a girl like that could work on your subconscious. Could set your mind off the track, could make you dream up wild ones — like this one — to save her life. Had he, or hadn't he? The answer was no. He was sure it was no.

"Barney," he said. "I may be wrong and I may be right. But, win or lose, if I'm still a cop when this is done, I'll be a better cop. You're a good cop, but you're hide-bound. You think your job is to convict the guilty. That's only half of it. The other half is to protect the innocent — no matter who, the girl you love, or the guy you hate."

"A beautiful thought," Barney said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Maybe I'm in love with Susan Wood. Even so, I wouldn't rig a deal like this to build a reasonable doubt.

"So you say," Shea said. "I'll tell you this: you better win. You got my job — you know it, I know it. If you're wrong on this, I'm goin' to hang you by your heels.

They sat in silence then. The traffic had thinned out. The radio muttered and was still again. A boy and girl passed, holding hands and giggling. Short of the corner, they veered abruptly toward the street. Then they hurried on. Easter kept his eyes on that patch of dark. Somebody down there had startled the kids.

The radio spoke now. "Car 310 . . . 310." Easter picked up the microphone. The voice was Fred Keeney's. "I remembered, Jim. He's in the file. He's Dave Kurthauser, a long-time racket man, a big wheel from back East. Not wanted, far's we know."

"Well?" Barney asked, as Easter switched off the radio.

"Boccicho is our boy, Frankie Boom. He kills for the syndicate. He likes ice picks."

"You want a pick-up on him —"

"Not yet!" Easter watched the path of deep shadow at the block end. Maybe, maybe, maybe. That Washburn, that Kurthauser, had been very much afraid. "We'll wait a while yet," he said. "What can we lose?"

Then Easter's hand closed hard on Barney's arm. A hunched figure stood in the alley mouth. The man who had called himself Washburn came out of the shadows, carrying two suitcases. A hundred feet beyond the court entrance, he stopped beside a car parked at the curb.

"That's the boy," Barney said.

"And there's Frankie," Easter said. "Farther on, in the shadows, coming this way. Let's move up."

Barney Shea took the car away in a sudden burst of speed. He passed Washburn's car and cut back to the curb and a hard-braking stop. Easter had his door opened and his gun in his hand.

"I'll take him," he said. "You cover."

He hit the pavement running. Boccicho was crouching, shoulders flat against the fender of a parked car. Easter moved in on him.

"Frankie, you're under arrest."

Frankie Boccicho came erect slowly. Light caught his eyes, showed them glittering. His right hand dug suddenly at his coat pocket. A fool's move. Flame spurted from the police sedan, and Boccicho crumpled, fell and died.

Easter and Barney did not speak again until they were on their way downtown, the mopping up left to other men. Easter rode, anger smoldering deep inside him. Easter finally said what he had to say.

"I had plenty of time. I could have slugged him."

"So?" Barney Shea said. "To me it looked close. Anyway —" He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paused. "It's just as well. What'd you have on Frankie? Nothing. He'd walk loose again, the way he did the other dozen times. This way he's all washed up.

"And another thing," Barney said. "He's not going to be around to say he didn't kill Hamilton. And this fellow Kurthauser's told us enough so we know he was the guy Frankie was after. So Frankie can't pin the killing on cutie, can he? You tell it the way you know it happened and she walks free. Is that nothing?"

"It's very much," Easter said.

"So, okay," Barney said. "It's an ill wind."

Then Barney Shea had one thing more to say. He looked at Easter without a break on his cold face or a hint of a smile.

"The job's too big for me, he said. "I'm hide-bound."

James Easter watched her come down the hall. She looked better than she had, though she still walked like a wooden doll. No one had told her. She looked at Easter, half afraid, half pleading. "Don't hurt me any more," her expression said.

"You didn't do it, Susie," Easter said. "You're free."

She looked at him, her dark eyes growing wider. In a moment she understood, in another moment she believed. Then she crumpled. Easter caught her in his arms. It was good, he thought, to be able to do a thing like this for her. And he would never let her far from his arms again. This girl who had skinned her knees. . .

The Price of a Tea-pot and Tea-spoon

Friday last, the Trial of John Webster came on, when he was indicted and found guilty of breaking open the dwelling house of Mr. William Clemm of this City on the 24th of September 1750, in the night; and taking from thence a Silver Tea-pot and tea-spoon; upon which he received the Sentence of Death.

News item in the New-York Gazette, April 27, 1752.

(Contributed by Rita Gottesman)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So far as we have been able to check, Erle Stanley Gardner's bloodhound-buccaneer — the light-fingered, lightning-witted Lester Leith — was born in print some time in 1929. During the next ten years Mr. Gardner wrote more than 60 novelettes about the sophisticated and debonair young clubman who solved crimes merely from the newspaper reports and then relieved the crooks of their ill-gotten spoils. After 1939 Lester Leith appeared less frequently; nevertheless, another dozen or more exploits were added to the original saga. So it can be estimated, with reasonable accuracy, that Lester Leith was involved in at least 75 capers in which he combined academic criminology with practical crime.

Now, the lean, languid Lester was no piker. He was seldom interested in picayune pirating. The causes célèbres which caught his fancy were usually loaded with loot. It would be entirely on the modest side to calculate his average "take" at $100,000 per shakedown. This means that Leith's detective-crime career netted him a cool $7,500,000 — all of which, we hasten to remind you, in justice to his Robin-Hood heart, Lester Leith turned over to deserving charities — less, of course, "20 per cent for costs of collection."

We now bring to you the last of our Lester Leith fantasias. Its climax takes place in Honolulu. So, aloha to the tales of the good old days — and aloha to the stories of the prodigious present!

THE HAND IS QUICKER THAN THE EYE

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

LESTER LEITH, SPRAWLED IN A CHAISE longue on the screened balcony of his apartment, read the newspaper account of the theft with considerable interest.

A few paces behind him, Edward H. Beaver, the police undercover man who had insinuated his way into Leith's service as a valet, made a great show of dusting; but his beady eyes were riveted on the slender, well-knit figure of the man whom police considered the most brilliant crime technician of the decade.

The newspaper account was somewhat vague. The theft had taken place at the residence of Charles Sansone, the well-known authority on Asiatic history, who had recently returned from an extended trip in the Orient. The victim of the theft had been one Katiska Shogiro, a Japanese gentle-

Copyright, 1939, by Popular Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Popular Publications, Inc., and Erle Stanley Gardner

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man who owned a pearl necklace of immense value. The clasp of the necklace was of that peculiar bright yellow gold which characterizes Chinese workmanship, and while undoubtedly the necklace bore a resemblance to a priceless museum piece which had vanished from the storeroom of the Forbidden City, Shogiro smilingly explained that the resemblance was purely superficial.

Sansone, it seemed, was interested in the necklace. It had even been intimated that he contemplated its purchase. In any event, Katiska Shogiro had been invited to the highly cosmopolitan dinner part at which Frank Thoms, the big game hunter, Peter Grier, the explorer, and Silman Shore, the expert trapshooter, were also present. Because Charles Sansone's secretary, Mah Foy, was Chinese, Sansone had tactfully given her a day and night off, although she usually supervised the details of his dinner parties, and was generally present in the capacity of hostess. . . .

Beaver, the pseudo-valet, becoming more and more absorbed in watching the man upon whom he spied, slowed down his dusting operations until his hands barely moved.

Leith, looking up, said, "Something wrong, Scuttle?"

The valet resumed his duties with alacrity, replying, "No, sir."

It had long been a matter of great irritation to him that Leith refused to address him by the name of Beaver, but habitually referred to him as "Scuttle," a nickname bestowed because of a fancied resemblance in Leith's mind to a reincarnated pirate. Now the valet concealed his irritation by seizing the opportunity to discuss the theft of the necklace. He knew from experience that if he could turn Leith's razor-sharp mind to the problem of the theft, it was quite possible that Leith, with no more information than was given by the newspaper accounts, would spot the thief. Once that had been done, the spy knew that a series of baffling and seemingly unrelated incidents would then occur which would culminate in Leith urbanely walking off with the loot under such circumstances that the police would be just one jump behind. Later, one of Leith's charities would be enhanced by the exact amount which Leith had received for the sale of the loot, less 20 per cent which the police shrewdly suspected was retained by Leith as the costs of collection.

Beaver lived in anticipation of the moment when Leith's smooth-working mind would overlook a bet, and the police would not be that one jump behind. So far that had not happened. At times the police had been almost on Leith's heels, but they had never quite caught up.

"A most baffling crime, sir," the spy said.

"Baffling?" Leith asked.

"Yes, sir. The pearl necklace."

"Oh, that," Leith said. "I fail to see anything baffling about it, Scuttle. It's a run-of-the-mill crime. I suppose it would seem baffling to the un-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trained mind because of the mystery which seems to surround the manner in which Shogiro acquired the necklace in the first place. However, that's only background. The crime itself is quite simple."

"Simple, sir!" the valet exclaimed.

"Exactly," Leith said.

"Perhaps then," the spy said, in his best wheedling technique, "you can tell me who committed it."

Leith selected a cigarette and said quite calmly, "That's true, Scuttle."

"What's true, sir?"

"Perhaps I could tell you the identity of the thief."

"Yes, sir?" the spy asked eagerly.

Leith struck a match.

"I'm waiting, sir," the valet said.

"A most commendable habit," Leith said, "that of patience, Scuttle. I recommend it most highly. At times, I've noticed a tendency on your part to be impatient."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you said you were going to tell me the identity of the culprit."

Leith said, "Oh, no, Scuttle. There you go, misunderstanding me again. You merely mentioned that *perhaps* I could tell you the identity of the thief, and I admitted that *perhaps* I could."

The spy flushed, but he kept his voice under control. "Yes, sir. I appreciate the distinction. Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it," Leith said.

The spy tried another approach. "Of course, sir," he said, with a cunning gleam in his eye, "any man of ordinary intelligence could point out the *probable* criminal in five cases out of ten. The police, however, have a different problem. They have to *prove* that a man is guilty."

Leith said, almost musingly, "After all, Scuttle, why not? The crime has everything to challenge the imagination of the investigator: Oriental background, fabulous pearls, a mysterious disappearance, and — Yes, Scuttle, I will commission you to do it."

"To do what, sir?"

"To go through the newspapers and note every single fact about the crime."

The spy's eyes lit up. "Yes, sir. When shall I start?"

"Right now," Leith said. "And by the way, Scuttle . . ."

"Yes, sir."

"I notice that Mr. Sansone has a Chinese secretary."

"Yes, sir."

"Find out about her. Get a full description of the pearls. I think Mr. Shogiro stated they were the duplicate of a string which has been illustrated in some publication on the museum pieces of China. Find out whether Peter Grier speaks Chinese, and whether Frank Thoms, the big game hunter, intends to go to Alaska this fall for Kodiac grizzly. And, oh, yes, find out if Shogiro has given up his proposed trip to Europe. As I remember it, he intended to sail the middle of the month."

"Yes, sir."

"And get me the address of every

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

manufacturer in the city who handles equipment for amateur magicians."

The spy blinked.

"And," Leith said, "I think that is all — for the moment."

Lester Leith strolled into the newspaper office with a want ad.

"Help Wanted — Female," he said to the young woman behind the counter. "Run this ad in a box so that it will attract considerable attention."

She read it through, then glanced quickly at Leith. "It will cost a lot," she explained.

"Quite all right," he assured her.

She counted the words, made a note of the total, and then looked at the hundred-dollar bill which Leith took from his pocket and slipped across the counter. She opened the cash drawer, made change, and handed him a receipt.

"I want the earliest possible publication," he said.

"Yes, sir."

She followed him with her eyes as he left the office, then hastily beckoned to the girl on her left. "Gosh, Mamie," she said, "don't you wish you were Chinese?"

"Shucks, no," the girl said, patting her hair. "Who was the swell, Gert?"

"Read it," Gertrude said, handing Leith's copy over to Mamie. "He wants a Chinese secretary who is young and free to travel. He wants someone who knows Chinese history and who has a college education. He offers to pay six hundred dollars a month and all traveling expenses. . . . Think of working for a guy like him — and getting six hundred bucks a month for it!"

Meanwhile, Leith took a taxi to one of the largest bookstores. "I want some of your best books," he said, "on legerdemain."

And while this was happening, Beaver sat closeted with Sergeant Ackley at police headquarters. Ackley worried the stump of a cold cigar as he listened, his forehead puckered into a prodigious frown.

When the undercover man had finished, Ackley said, "Listen, Beaver, if we could put this thing across, we could make a clean-up. Shogiro has offered a reward of five thousand bucks and no questions asked."

The undercover man whistled.

Sergeant Ackley said, "I'll get you the file, and you can go over it. Don't let him get away on this, Beaver. This is the biggest thing we've ever tackled. If we could nail him, and at the same time get that necklace, we could kill two birds with one stone. Think of what you could do with twenty-five hundred bucks in cold, hard cash."

The undercover man sighed.

"Don't overlook Charles Sansone in this thing," Sergeant Ackley said. "The facts point to him as the slicker, although he's fired his Chinese secretary — a nice way of diverting suspicion from himself."

"Why?" Beaver asked. "That is, what reason does he give for firing her?"

"Seems she'd violated instructions. Sansone told her to clear out and not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

come back until after the dinner. He had his eye on that necklace — wanted to buy it from Shogiro. Shogiro wanted to sell it. They were doing a little trading on the price. Apparently, the necklace is a pip, in addition to which it was worn by the Empress Dowager of China and has a lot of history attached to it. . . . By the way, what's all this stuff about the amateur magic?"

"Hanged if I know," Beaver said. "You know what he does when he starts working on a case. He gets a lot of goofy stuff together. Some of it's important, some of it isn't — but it all fits in some way."

"Well," Sergeant Ackley chuckled, "this is once he'll come a cropper. He hasn't any head start on us this time. We're in on the ground floor."

Lester Leith eyed the Chinese girl thoughtfully. Her skin was smooth as old ivory. The eyes were slightly slanted. She was in her late twenties, and her voice had that delicacy of expression which is indicative of a race which must have vocal chords so finely trained, and an ear so delicately receptive, as to distinguish any one of the eight tones in which a syllable of the Chinese language may be spoken.

She said, very casually, "There are not a great number of Chinese girls in this country who know both the Chinese written and spoken language, have first-hand experience with their native land, and possess a degree from a Western university."

"I daresay that is right."

Her eyes glittered in a swift survey of his face, but her face remained blank. "One might almost have thought," she said, "that the advertisement was intended to single me out."

Leith said, "I hadn't thought of it that way, but anyone who did possess the rather unusual combination of qualifications could be pardoned for thinking so."

"Then you pardon me?"

"Yes."

There was the ghost of a twinkle in her eyes as she said, "Then I think so."

Leith laughed. "All right," he said. "Miss Foy, I acknowledge the guilt. To be perfectly frank with you, I read in the newspaper account of the theft of that necklace that you had been dismissed because of a violation of instructions."

"My dismissal," she said, "was unjust."

"What happened?"

"My employer suggested that because he was desirous of purchasing the necklace, and because Mr. Shogiro would be suspicious if one of my race was a guest at the dinner, that it would be well to absent myself, not only from the dinner, but from the house."

"You failed to do so?"

"I did exactly as he requested. Unfortunately, however, I discovered that I had lost some very valuable jade which my mother had given me. It was a pendant, and evidently the supporting ring had almost worn through. The pendant had caught on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something, and all that was left was the chain."

"So you returned to the house?" Lester Leith asked.

"I did. I tried to return in such a way that no one would notice. But I failed."

"Did you find the jade?"

"Yes. It had caught on one of the drapes in my bedroom and had dropped to the floor."

"What sort of chap is Sansone?" Leith asked.

She said, very calmly, "I'm afraid I do not understand. Is it not the purpose to ask the former employer concerning the character of the employee, rather than to to ask the employee about the character of her former employer?"

Leith said, "Doubtless that is the custom, but I asked the question for a very particular purpose."

"He is a gentleman," Mah Foy said.

Leith drummed with the tips of his fingers on the table. "If perhaps he had thought that a theft would occur while Shogiro was at his house, and wished to protect you, he might have been shrewd and considerate enough to suggest that you arrange a perfect alibi for yourself."

He saw quick flashing interest in her eyes.

"But how could he have anticipated that a theft would occur while Shogiro was under his roof?"

Lester Leith brushed the question aside. "That, of course, is something for the police to consider. It is just a thought."

"Are you then a detective?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"And do you actually have need for a secretary, Mr. Leith, or did you wish to interrogate me?"

"Both," Leith said. "If you would like the job, you're hired. The salary is six hundred a month. You will have your traveling expenses taken care of, and, if necessary, we can consider a reasonable wardrobe a part of your traveling expenses."

"You intend to travel?"

"Yes."

"May I ask where?"

"To the Hawaiian Islands."

She raised her eyebrows. "To Honolulu?"

"Yes."

"That will be delightful," she said. "I am considered an expert typist. I can take rapid dictation in shorthand, and I feel certain that I could do your work. When do you wish me to start?"

"At once."

"You mean now — this instant?"

"Yes."

She said, "Very well. May I see the typewriter please?"

Leith said, "There won't be any typing for the present, Miss Foy."

"What is it you wish me to do?"

"Wait here for my return."

"So I may make appointments?"

"Yes," Leith said, getting to his feet. "I have a valet who should be back at any moment. His name is Beaver. I call him Scuttle. He has been with me for some time, and I have the greatest confidence in his loyalty and integrity."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But one should expect that of all employees."

"Exactly," Leith said, "but I can double it in the case of Scuttle. I have absolutely no secrets from him."

"That is very nice."

Leith said, "He will probably ask you questions about what you are doing here and what was said in this interview."

She said, "My race considers that it is the province of the servant to work, of the master to ask questions."

"Well, Scuttle has his own ideas," Leith said, with something of a twinkle in his eyes, "and I would be particularly happy if you would answer all his questions quite truthfully, because, you see, if you didn't, he might think I had cautioned you not to, and I wouldn't want to hurt him for the world."

"Very well," she said.

"And," Leith said, "I really feel, Miss Foy, that you shouldn't hold any grudge against Mr. Sansone. It may well have been that he asked you to leave for your own protection. As I get the story from the newspapers, Mr. Shogiro called on him the day before the dinner at which the necklace was stolen. At that time, Sansone inspected the necklace. The next evening Shogiro came to dinner and brought the necklace with him. It was in a carved ivory jewel case which Shogiro carried in the inside pocket of his coat. After dinner, at the request of Mr. Sansone, he produced the necklace so that Mr. Sansone's guests could see it. At that time, the necklace was found to be an imitation. The assumption, of course, is that a substitution had been made sometime during the evening. But isn't it quite possible that Mr. Sansone had perhaps recognized the necklace as an imitation *when he first saw it?*"

"In that case, why did he not tell Mr. Shogiro?"

"Because," Leith said, "he wasn't certain. You'll note that the dinner was for men only — men who knew something about pearls and about China. In fact, I believe it was one of the guests who observed that the pearls were imitation."

"So I understand," she said.

Leith abruptly got to his feet. "That," he said, "is all, Miss Foy. You are hired. Your salary starts at once. If anyone should appear and ask for me, state that I have gone out and will return in an hour."

Leith opened the door of his apartment and stood to one side. A taxi driver, loaded with parcels, staggered into the room.

"Where do you want these put, boss?"

"Any place," Leith said. "My man will put them away. Here, Scuttle, give a hand."

The undercover man, who had been engaged in low-voiced conversation with Mah Foy, jumped forward to help the cab driver.

Leith said, "There's more in the cab, Scuttle. If you will go back with the driver, you can bring the other parcels up."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When the valet and the cab driver had gone, Mah Foy said, in her musical voice, "May I assist you in opening the packages and putting them away, Mr. Leith?"

"Not yet," Leith said. "We'll await Scuttle's return. Scuttle will be interested to know what's in the packages. He's very curious, in case you hadn't noticed."

Mah Foy said, "I have noticed."

"Questions?" Leith asked.

"Many questions."

Leith said, "I trust that you remembered to answer them fully."

"Quite fully," she said.

Leith grinned. "We'll stack these bundles to one side," he said.

Together they moved the packages so that the doorway was cleared.

Even the Chinese girl showed curiosity as the undercover man and the cab driver returned with another load of packages.

"That all?" Leith asked.

"That's all, sir," the cab driver said.

When the cab driver had left, Leith closed the door and surveyed the array of packages. "Very well, Scuttle," he said, "you may open them."

Eagerly the undercover man produced a knife and started cutting cords.

Leith said, "Be careful, Scuttle. Many of those things are fragile."

"Yes, sir," the undercover man said.

He pulled back the heavy, brown wrapping paper, lifted the lid off a box, and brought out a glass bowl. "What's this?" he asked.

"A goldfish bowl," Leith said. "Not an ordinary goldfish bowl, of course, but one that has valuable properties."

"I don't see anything special, sir."

Leith said, "You'll observe, Scuttle, that there's a circular partition in that bowl. When it is filled with water, this circular partition acts as a huge magnifying glass. Place that in front of an audience, and a small section of the bowl directly in back of it is magnified so that it looks as though the whole bowl is filled with water in which goldfish are swimming. As a matter of fact, only a small portion of the bowl contains water or goldfish."

The undercover man straightened. "The audience?"

"Exactly," Lester Leith said calmly.

Scuttle appeared slightly bewildered.

"But I don't see what an audience has to do with it, if you don't mind my saying so, sir?"

Leith said, "We are going in for prestidigitation, legerdemain, sleight of hand, optical illusions, parlor magic, and general hocus-pocus, Scuttle."

"You mean you're going to take that up as an occupation, sir?"

"Tut, tut," Leith said. "You should know me better. I prefer to retain my amateur standing. Well, open the others, Scuttle."

The undercover man opened a flat, heavy package. "What's this? It looks like an ordinary double slate like those used in school."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You shouldn't say that, Scuttle," Leith said. "It dates you. However, you are quite right. Observe, Scuttle, how easy it is to communicate with the unseen forces which guard our lives. Ah, there it is — the sponge."

"Yes, sir," the spy said, producing the sponge from a corner of the box.

"Now, Scuttle, if you will just step into the kitchen and dampen this sponge, you can wipe off both sides of the slate. There should be some slate pencils — ah, here they are."

Leith took out a package of slate pencils.

The undercover man, holding the sponge in his hand, stepped into the kitchenette. Leith glanced across at Mah Foy, the Chinese girl, and winked at her.

She watched him with an impassive countenance on which there was not the slightest flicker of expression, but just as the valet returned with the moistened sponge, she lowered her own right lid, although her face remained as calmly placid as though it were carved from old ivory.

"Now then," Leith said, "if you'll just take this slate, Scuttle, and clean it with the wet sponge. Make absolutely certain that there is no writing on it."

"Yes, sir," the valet said, wiping off the surfaces of the slate.

"Now take it into the bathroom, get a towel, and dry it carefully."

Beaver produced a towel and carefully dried the slate.

"Now," Leith said, "I don't want you to let that slate out of your sight, Scuttle. First, we'll put a piece of pencil between the leaves of the slate. Hold it open, Scuttle, just so. That's right. Now we'll close it, and you might take it over and place it on that table in the far corner of the room, being careful not to take your eyes from it for even a moment."

The valet did as he was instructed.

"Now, Scuttle, watch closely. See if you can see the spirits."

"The spirits, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle, the . . . *There they are!*"

A faint squeaking noise became distinctly audible.

"Good heavens, sir!" the valet exclaimed. "Is that noise coming from — from the slate?"

"From the slate, Scuttle."

Beaver's eyes widened.

"And now, Scuttle," Leith said, as the noise ceased, "I wouldn't be surprised if we had a message from the unseen world."

"But surely, sir, you're fooling."

"Not at all, Scuttle. Just pick up the slate and bring it to me. Ah, that's right."

Leith took the slate from the valet. Only the Chinese girl noticed the manner in which he fumbled with the catch as he opened the double slate.

A message, written in a distinctly feminine hand, appeared across the inner surface of the slate. It read: *First warning. Be very careful, Beaver, not to tell any falsehoods after you have started for Honolulu. Ruth.*

The spy was visibly shaken. "Good heavens!" he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leith frowned. "What the devil are they talking about, Scuttle?"

"Who?" the spy asked.

"The spirits. And what is all this about a trip to Honolulu?"

"I assure you, sir, I don't know."

"And who is Ruth? Someone perhaps who has gone to the other shore, Scuttle?"

"The other shore, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle. I —"

"Good grief!" the valet suddenly exclaimed, staring at Leith with eyes which seemed about to bulge from their sockets.

"What is it, Scuttle?"

"Ruth!" Beaver exclaimed. "My wife!"

"Your wife, Scuttle? I didn't know you were married."

"It was some time ago, sir. I was married for two years. But she was — she was killed in an auto accident."

Leith said, closing the slate as though that disposed of the matter, "Undoubtedly, Scuttle, the message is from your departed wife who wishes to warn you against the result of any falsehood should you take a trip to Honolulu."

Beaver turned pale. "It's uncanny."

"Oh, quite," Leith said airily, dismissing the subject. "But we can't neglect these other boxes, Scuttle."

The spy took a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead. "If it's all the same to you, sir," he said, "I'd like to postpone the rest of it for a while. I'm feeling shaky, sir. I —"

Leith said, "That's all right, Scuttle. You'd better have a drink. Perhaps Miss Foy will join us."

The Chinese girl shook her head.

"Well," Leith said, "a couple of Scotch and sodas, Scuttle — or perhaps you'd prefer to make yours a double brandy?"

"Yes, sir, I would."

When the valet had filled the glasses, Leith sat on the arm of a chair, casually sipping his Scotch and soda. "Do you know, Scuttle," he said, "there's one other thing I didn't get."

"What's that, sir?"

"A stooge."

"But I don't understand."

"Did you ever see a magician on the stage?"

"Yes, sir, a couple of times."

"Then you've noticed that a magician is invariably accompanied by a young stage assistant, a very beautiful young woman who is easy on the eye and whose skirts are always very short?"

"Yes, sir, I do remember that."

Scuttle was puzzled.

"Exactly, Scuttle," Leith said. "That's the first principle of stage magic — divided attention. The idea is that the hand is quicker than the eye, but the eye can't watch the hand when it's stealing glances at a pair of beautiful legs. So what we need, Scuttle, is a girl with beautiful legs."

"Yes, sir. Do you wish me to get you one, sir?"

"No, Scuttle, I will select my own stooge."

And Lester Leith abruptly left the apartment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man who ran the theatrical employment agency was frankly skeptical.

"Do I understand," he said, "that you wish to hire a young woman who has been thrown out of employment by the recent drive against burlesque shows?"

"That's exactly it," Leith said. "I want a young woman who is beautiful, who is accustomed to the public admiration of her curves, and who has just about given up hope."

The agent said, "You might try Ora Sanders. That poor kid certainly has had a tough time. Last Friday her roommate tried to commit suicide. Ora hocked everything she had except the clothes she stood in, and kicked through with every last cent to help the kid out."

"Where," Leith asked, "can I find Miss Sanders?"

"I'll reach her for you. What's the nature of the employment?"

Leith coughed deprecatingly. "I'm an amateur magician," he said. "I want a young woman who can assist me."

"You can't go wrong on Ora," the agent said. "Let me give her a ring."

"If possible," Leith said, "I'd prefer to see her in her room rather than here in the office, and I'd like to see her right away."

The agent dialed a number, said, "Miss Sanders, please," and then, after a moment, "I'm sending a Mr. Leith to discuss employment at fifty dollars a week. Is that satisfactory? . . . Fine. . . . Yes, almost at once."

He hung up, and said to Leith, "She'll be glad to see you. Here's her address."

Leith found Ora Sanders to be a blonde with light blue eyes that were waging a losing battle with the fine wrinkles of worry, a determined chin, and smiling lips. Her small, poorly lighted room was well covered with autographed theatrical pictures.

Leith introduced himself.

"Manna from heaven!" she exclaimed. "Come on in."

"I am in somewhat of a hurry," Leith explained.

"In that event, you can dispense with telling me that times are hard, that there aren't many jobs available, and I'll be fortunate to get work with you; and I'll dispense with telling you that times aren't hard for me, that I've had two offers lately, but that neither is just what I want, so that I *might* consider something good."

Leith smiled. "The salary is fifty dollars a week."

"My agent told me that."

"Your duties," Lester said, "will be highly personal."

"Oh *oh!*" she remarked.

"I'm an amateur magician," Leith went on. "I have noticed that professional magicians usually have a young woman with beautiful legs appear on the stage to hand them their props."

She stepped back, placed her ankles together, and raised her skirt. "How are my legs?" she asked.

"Perfect," Leith said. "I can't imagine anyone in the audience keeping

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his mind on the disappearing watch with scenery like that to look at."

She dropped her skirts and with them her manner of easy banter. "Listen," she said, "I simply *have* to get a job. This isn't the sort of work I've been doing. I'm not certain that it's the kind I'd like to do, but if you're willing to take a chance on me, I'm willing to take a chance on you."

Leith opened his wallet and took out one hundred dollars. "Two weeks' salary," he explained. "And here's an extra hundred."

"An extra hundred," she echoed.

He nodded. "I want you to get some new clothes for your act. Brevity is the soul of wit, and I think you understand what is required."

He reached once more into his wallet and took out three hundred-dollar bills. "Here," he said, "is some expense money. Get a wardrobe."

"Now, wait a minute," she said. "I'm not going to pinch myself because I don't want to wake up, but let's not go overboard."

Leith said, "It's quite all right. You're going to take a trip on a boat. You'll need a couple of dinner gowns, a sports outfit, and accessories."

She said again. "Now, wait a minute. What do you want in return for all this?" And her eyes stared at Lester Leith with disconcerting frankness.

"Loyalty," Leith said. "A willingness to follow instructions."

She said, "Listen, I'm no tin angel, but—"

Leith smiled, put his wallet away, and said, "I think we understand each other, Miss Sanders. If you'll get out and do your shopping, I'll telephone instructions later."

The undercover man sat across the table from Sergeant Ackley and said, "Well, Sergeant, it's all off."

"What is?" Ackley asked.

"The whole thing," Beaver said. "It's just a runaround. He's either gone nuts, or else he's become suspicious and is taking us for a ride."

"Nonsense," Sergeant Ackley said, "not with a priceless string of matched pearls with a historical value which makes it a collector's item."

"All right, then," Beaver said, "suppose *you* figure it out."

Sergeant Ackley said, "That's what I'm here for, Beaver. You do the leg work. I furnish the brain that directs your energies. You're the contractor. I'm the architect."

"All right then," the undercover man said, "figure this out. He hires Charles Sansone's Chinese secretary. He hires a girl with the prettiest figure you've ever seen. He gets a thousand dollars' worth of parlor magic stuff, and announces he's taking the whole kit and kaboodle to Honolulu."

"To Honolulu?" Sergeant Ackley exclaimed. Then a look of smug satisfaction came over Ackley's countenance. "The trouble with you, Beaver, is that you haven't a deductive mind. You're observant and conscientious, but you're dealing with a man who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has a chain-lightning brain, and you can't think fast enough to put two and two together."

"Meaning," Beaver said, "that you have a highly trained mind."

"Naturally," Sergeant Ackley said modestly, "or I wouldn't be here."

"All right," Beaver said, "*you* tell *me* then. What's the answer?"

Sergeant Ackley picked up the morning paper, opened it to an inside page, and said, "Get a load of this. 'The international competition of skeet shooters is scheduled to take place in Honolulu two weeks from today. Silman Shore, a noted trapshooter who has already broken several records, expects to compete. Shore's photo is shown above.' "

Beaver's face showed amazed comprehension. "By gosh," he said, "it *may* make sense at that!"

"Of course it makes sense," Sergeant Ackley said. "Now, tell me exactly what's been going on."

Beaver said, "He wanted to know all about how the crime was committed. I told him. Most of it he could get from the newspapers anyway, and he's a shark at deducing things from what he reads in the papers."

"Exactly what did you tell him?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"I told him about Shogiro passing the necklace around for examination. Sansone pretended it was a social party. As a matter of fact, every one of the men there knows something about gems — or about Chinese history. Grier had seen the necklace when he was in the Forbidden City five years ago, and remembered it."

"Go on."

"Well, he was interested in finding out how the theft took place. I told him all we knew, that the necklace was shown around, that Grier was the last to look at it. He passed it to Sansone who had already looked at it. Sansone passed it back to Shogiro. Then, after a while, Sansone announced that he was intending to buy the necklace and asked Shore if he had noticed the workmanship of the catch. Shore said he'd paid more attention to the pearls than to the catch, and Shogiro obligingly took the ivory jewel case out of his pocket and handed it to Shore. Shore opened it, picked up the necklace, turned toward the light, and then, said, 'By George, this thing is counterfeit!' And then, of course, all hell broke loose.

"Well, Leith asked me to look up all the people who were there. I found out that Grier knows a lot about China. I found out that Charles Sansone is a well-known amateur magician. I found out that Thoms, the big game hunter, is going to Alaska —"

"Is he?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"He is," Beaver said.

"Well," Sergeant Ackley said, "as I see the situation, we have three suspects. Grier could very well have substituted necklaces when he handed the necklace to Sansone. Grier had already seen the necklace, knew exactly what it looked like, and could have had an imitation prepared.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sansone could have done it. He'd seen the necklace a couple of days before and he could have had an imitation ready. He's pretty good at sleight of hand. We can't leave Silman Shore out — he was the one to discover that it was an imitation."

"And don't overlook the fact that this Shogiro may be pulling a fast one," Beaver said.

"I don't think so," Sergeant Ackley observed. "He had nothing to gain."

"Well," Beaver said, "Leith was very much interested in finding out where Shogiro was going."

"And you found out?"

"Yes. Shogiro's canceling the trip he planned to Europe and is returning to Japan."

Sergeant Ackley's brows furrowed. "By way of Honolulu?" he asked.

"What do you think?" the undercover man replied.

The giant liner *Monterey* sent the long blast of a booming whistle echoing over the Los Angeles harbor. On the pier below, thousands of hysterical, waving people shouted farewells to the passengers who lined the decks. Streamers of colored paper, stretching from ship to shore, fluttered in the vagrant, night breeze. The air was filled with shouts and laughter.

Then a dark strip of water appeared between the pier and the white sides of the big ship. A surge of white water churned up from the stern. The big liner, graceful as a yacht, throbbed into motion, and the sleek white sides began to glide along the pier.

Lester Leith said to Ora Sanders, "Well, here we are, on our way — the start of adventure."

She looked up at him with bright eyes. "To think that *I* would ever have an experience like this," she breathed. "Oh, it's wonderful, simply wonderful!"

Leith moved over to rest his elbows on the teakwood rail. He glanced at Mah Foy standing motionless, the breeze swirling her skirts into gentle motion, her face utterly without expression.

Leith caught sight of the huge figure of Beaver towering above the other passengers. He motioned to him, and the valet joined him.

"You've looked over the passenger list, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who's aboard? of those at the dinner party when the necklace disappeared?"

"Shogiro," the undercover man said, "Mah Foy, Charles Sansone, and Silman Shore."

"Sansone?" Lester Leith exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"What's he doing aboard?"

"Apparently just taking a trip to the Islands."

Leith frowned thoughtfully. "Seen anyone else you know, Scuttle?"

"No, sir."

"Who's your cabin mate?"

The undercover man frowned.

"An old gentleman inclined to seasickness, I understand, and something

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of an invalid, sir. He'll probably be a nuisance. He asked me particularly to entertain my friends outside the cabin. He expects to spend most of the time in bed."

"Most annoying," Leith said. "Too bad you didn't get a more agreeable companion."

"Yes, sir," the valet said, "but I'm quite certain the trip will be very enjoyable. Is there anything you wish, sir? I've laid your clothes out and —"

"No, Scuttle. That will be all for tonight. Take life easy and enjoy yourself. I'm dog tired and am going to turn in."

Leith waved to Ora Sanders. Her face showed disappointment. She moved swiftly to his side and said, "Aren't you going to watch the Mainland out of sight? Have you no romance?"

He whispered, "I'm setting a trap. Meet me on the boat deck in fifteen minutes."

Leith said good night to Mah Foy and started in the direction of his cabin, but detoured to the boat deck where Ora Sanders found him a quarter of an hour later.

Leith said, "I want to be where I can see without being seen. Would you consider the duties of your employment too onerous if you sat over here in the shadow of the lifeboat and went into what is technically known as a huddle?"

She laughed. "I'd have been disappointed to think that I was starting on a trip to the Hawaiian Islands unhuddled," she said.

They sat close together in the shadow, talking in low tones. The couples who promenaded past them grew fewer in number as the ship swung out into the Pacific and the bow began to sway gently to the surge of the incoming swell.

Suddenly Leith exerted pressure on her arm. Ora Sanders followed the direction of his glance.

Beaver, accompanied by a stocky, bull-necked, broad-shouldered man, was promenading past. They heard him say, "It's okay now, Sarge. I told him you were an old invalid and to keep out of our cabin."

They walked past.

"Who was that?" Ora Sanders asked.

Leith smiled. "That," he said, "was Sergeant Arthur Ackley of the Metropolitan Police Force. I don't wish him any bad luck, but I hope he is highly susceptible to seasickness."

On the second day out, Mah Foy said to Lester Leith, "I haven't any definite idea of what you had in mind when you employed me. Certainly it wasn't to work."

Leith, sprawled in a deck chair and watching the intense blue waters of a semitropic ocean, smiled and said, "I am a man of extremes. When I work, I work long hours. When I loaf, I loaf long hours."

"So it would seem. Did you know that Mr. Sansone was going to be on this boat?"

"Frankly," Leith said, "I did not. I'm sorry if his presence causes you any embarrassment."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It doesn't," she said, "only he was surprised at seeing me here."

"I can understand that."

"Did you know that Katiska Shogiro was going to be a passenger?"

"I suspected that he might go as far as Honolulu."

"On this ship?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that Mr. Shore was going to be a passenger?"

"Yes," Leith said. "I knew that in advance."

She remained silent for several minutes, then she said, "If you have any work for me, please call."

"Wait a minute," Leith said as she arose from the deck chair. "I have one thing to ask of you."

"What is that, Mr. Leith?"

"Don't do anything rash. Promise me that you won't — at least until we are in Honolulu."

"Why?" she asked. "What made you think I contemplated doing anything you might describe as rash?"

"I have my reasons," Leith said.

She laughed. "My race has a proverb. 'Stirring the water does not help it to boil.' "

"A very good proverb," Leith said, "although I don't subscribe to it."

"You don't?"

"No," he said. "Stirring the water may not help it to boil, but it has other advantages."

"What are they?"

"Oh, for one thing," Leith said, "it scrambles the contents of the pot, and makes it difficult for an observer to know that the primary purpose of putting the pot on the stove was that to get the water to boil."

"Are you, by any chance, referring to the mysterious cabin mate who takes surreptitious midnight strolls with your valet?"

"Oh," Leith said, "you know about that?"

She said, "In my position, I try to know everything."

"And thought that you should tell me about it?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," Leith said, "for your loyalty."

She met his eyes. "There is one other thing. I was commissioned by my government to recover that necklace, sell it, and bring the proceeds back to China."

"Thanks for telling me," Leith said. "I surmised it."

Leith was reading a book when Ora Sanders, wearing a short-skirted sports outfit, shook off a group of admirers to drop into the empty deck chair beside him.

"When," she asked, "do we do sleight of hand?"

"Tonight," Leith said. "An impromptu entertainment by passengers. I have agreed to do a turn."

"That's fine," she said.

"You will, of course, wear your stage costume."

"I was hoping for that."

"Hoping?" he asked.

"Yes," she laughed. "So many of the male passengers have expressed a desire to see more of me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There is always the swimming tank," Leith suggested.

"I thought it might be better not to give them a preview."

"Very wise," he said. "By the way, have you met the captain?"

"Yes," she said.

"Think you could turn loose the battery of your eyes on him and make a suggestion?"

She nodded.

"At 2 o'clock tomorrow afternoon," Leith said, "I notice a skeet shoot is scheduled. I think it would be an excellent idea to advise the captain that we have aboard in the person of Mr. Silman Shore, a trapshooter of nationwide reputation. It would be very appropriate if Mr. Shore should give a little exhibition for the benefit of the passengers. He —" He broke off at the expression on her face. "What is it?"

"How many people do you have making suggestions?" she asked.

"Why?"

"That suggestion," she said, "was communicated to the captain this morning, shortly after the skeet shoot was noticed on the bulletin board."

"Who suggested it to him?"

"A Japanese by the name of Shogiro, a very interesting gentleman who has spent much of his time trying to cultivate my acquaintance."

Leith considered the statement in thoughtful silence. At length, he said, "Proof that great minds run in the same channels."

"Tell me," she said, "did my announcement distress you?"

"Not distress me," Leith said, "but it does give me food for thought — food which must be carefully chewed lest it give me mental indigestion."

She slid out of the chair with her sports skirt sliding up the well-shaped legs. "Okay," she said, "I'll run along before you get a mental tummyache."

"Don't do that again," Leith said.

"What?"

"Distract my attention," he said. "Remember that your province is to distract the attention of the audience."

"And I can't practice on you a little bit?"

"Well," Leith said judicially, "just a little — a *very* little bit."

Half an hour later, Katiska Shogiro dropped casually into the deck chair next to Lester Leith's. After a moment, he said in his very polite manner, "Excussse pleassse, but would it be interrupting your honorable meditations unduly if I humbly ask for match?"

"Not in the least," Leith said, and handed over a packet of matches.

Shogiro lit his cigarette. "Passengers," he said conversationally, "have explain that very skillful magician is aboard contained in person of honorable you. Is possible perhaps that attentive student may look forward to exhibition tonight?"

Leith said, "I would hardly commend my amateurish attempts to the observation of an interested student. You know something of sleight of hand?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Shogiro laughed. "Only very small ability," he said, "but large interest."

Leith said, "The idea of magic is to furnish entertainment. To a student of the art, the tricks will prove very transparent. I trust that you will remember that explanation destroys the mystery."

"Oh, quite," Shogiro said.

I trust that I can count upon your silent cooperation?

"Even clam," Shogiro explained, "is like parrot compared with Japanese contemplation of magic performed by good friend who gives matches to humble and unworthy student."

Lester Leith's face showed relief.

"You are perhaps of long-time proficiency?" Shogiro asked.

"No," Leith said. "My performance makes up in equipment that which it lacks in skill."

"Equipment?" Shogiro asked.

"Equipment for misdirecting attention," Leith said. "As a student, you will realize that the success of all magic lies in misdirecting the attention of the observer."

"Oh, quite," Shogiro said.

"Therefore," Leith said, "I have sought to avail myself of the greatest attention distractor known to science."

"Referring to which?"

"The pulchritude of feminine curves," Leith said. "Miss Sanders has consented to act as my accomplice."

"Very estimable distraction," Shogiro said.

"I trust it will prove quite sufficient."

"Confidence indeed is not misplaced," Shogiro remarked, arising abruptly from the chair. "And now humble student begs permission to retire and leave honorable master in contemplation of mystifying trickery to be performed in evening. Thanking you very much."

"Not at all," Leith said, and Shogiro walked rapidly down the deck, his manner that of a man who is embarking upon a very definite mission.

Entertainment that night was in the hands of the passengers who contributed various forms of diversion. A dance team headed for Australia put on a tap dance, an artistic waltz, and a variation of the rumba. A poetess whose work had been published in some of the national magazines recited her favorite poem. A pianist played a selection from the classics, followed by some comedy jazz and a ragtime interpretation of one of the more familiar tunes of the gay Nineties.

Beaver slipped through a rear door and took a seat in the back of the social hall. A moment later he signaled, and Sergeant Ackley, making himself as inconspicuous as possible, slipped into the adjoining chair and slumped down so as to make himself less noticeable. "Watch him, Beaver," he whispered. "He's going to pull something with this sleight-of-hand business."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Up in the front row, Mah Foy was separated only by two chairs from Katiska Shogiro, who sat perfectly still, a smile of fixed politeness frozen on his face.

A couple of stewards started bringing in various pieces of equipment. The purser, who acted as master of ceremonies, said, "We have with us tonight a man who can do tricks that would make masters envious. These are no ordinary sleight-of-hand tricks. These optical illusions represent the latest achievements of science. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Mr. Lester Leith."

Leith came forward and bowed. There was polite applause.

He said, "May I have your indulgence for a moment, please?" and walked down to where Mah Foy was seated.

"Shortly after the performance starts," he whispered in the ear of the Chinese girl, "a man who was at that dinner is going to get up and leave the room. I want you to follow him and later tell me where he goes and what he does."

Mah Foy nodded.

Leith stepped back to the lighted circle and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, let me present my assistant, Miss Ora Sanders."

Ora, attired in a robe which covered her from neck to ankles, came forward and bowed. There was polite applause. She slipped off the robe and stood before the audience, garbed in black and white; a low-cut black blouse with white trimmings, a very short black skirt, a small white lace apron, and high black stockings.

The applause hesitated for a moment, then burst out anew. When the applause had subsided, Lester Leith said, "I'm going to ask your indulgence, ladies and gentlemen. Despite the comments of the purser, I feel that my performance may fall far short of his glowing description. However, I will do my best."

The purser said, "What's the idea of the apology? You told me this afternoon you were the best in the west."

There was a roar of laughter.

Leith said, "A man always exaggerates his qualifications to get the job. No hard feelings."

He advanced and shook hands with the purser. Suddenly he said, "Wait a minute. You don't want this," and took an egg from the purser's side coat pocket. "And what's this? Tut, tut. You shouldn't be carrying a black widow spider around on your sleeve!"

With a startled exclamation the purser jumped back and brushed at his arm. The spider dropped to the floor and lay with its rubber legs quivering.

Leith said, "Tut, tut. Having killed my pet, you should at least give him a decent burial. Here, take this little casket. Put him in that."

He handed the purser a small box. The purser bent forward, and Leith signaled to Ora Sanders, who handed him a loaded slapstick.

Just as the purser picked up the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spider, the slapstick connected with that portion of his trousers which stretched tight in the stooping process. The impact set off the blank cartridge which had been imbedded in the slapstick, and the purser's reactions were all that the gleeful audience could have anticipated.

When the discomfited purser had retired, Leith nodded to Ora Sanders. She brought forward a table, and, opening a box, took out a goldfish bowl, in which the audience could plainly see goldfish swimming around.

Leith looked around the audience, then singled out Silman Shore. "Mr. Shore," he called.

"What is it?"

"You're an expert hunter, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe to the audience what you see in this bowl?"

"Goldfish," Shore said.

Leith said, "Tut, tut. You need to have your eyes examined." He reached in the goldfish bowl and pulled out a live, kicking rabbit, and, thereafter, while the audience applauded, he took out object after object from a bowl which apparently contained only live goldfish swimming about in water.

"Thank you, Mr. Shore," Leith said, "for your cooperation. After all, you know, it adds to our amusement when we see our fellow travelers taking part. Mr. Shogiro, might I ask you to step forward please."

"It is pleasure," Shogiro said.

Leith said, "I noticed that you seemed rather hungry in the dining room tonight. Apparently, you're a man with a large appetite. . . . Ah, yes, I thought so. Turn around please."

Shogiro turned around, and Lester Leith reached down the back of his coat to pull out a bunch of celery, which he held up to the audience, then tossed to Ora Sanders.

"Now wait a minute," he said as Shogiro, smiling politely, started back toward his seat. "What's that you have in your pocket?"

Shogiro followed the direction of Leith's eyes, and said, "Excusse pleasse. That is handkerchief for wiping eyes which have tears of laughter caused by amusement at honorable act."

There was just a trace of sarcasm in what he said, although his manner was that of smiling politeness. The audience applauded, and waited for Leith's comeback.

Leith reached out to take the corner of the silk handkerchief in his thumb and forefinger. He started pulling it out an inch or two at a time. "Very nice handkerchief," he said, "but what is this?"

Shogiro, smiling broadly, watched Lester Leith pull out yards and yards of silk ribbon and handkerchiefs. When he had finished he tossed the ball of silk to Ora Sanders.

Shogiro, standing very still, said, "Honorable gentleman have removed everything from pocket?"

"I certainly hope so," Leith said.

"Are sure is not more?" Shogiro asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The audience, sensing that the Japanese was trying to turn the tables on Leith, leaned forward in their seats.

"Well," Leith said, "if there's anything left in that pocket, Mr. Shogiro, you may keep it."

The audience laughed at the sally, but the laughter changed into roars as Shogiro, reaching into the pocket, pulled out what apparently was a human finger. He held it up and bent it double, showing that it was made of colored rubber. He inserted it between the fingers of his own hand, moved his hand rapidly, and the finger had vanished.

"Excusse pleasse," Shogiro said, "but in my country when honorable gentleman perform trick with false finger, unwinding yards of silk ribbon stored therein, is always customary to remove empty finger after trick is completed."

Shogiro turned and started toward the front row once more, but Leith again called him back. This time there was an ominous glitter in the eyes of the Japanese, although his lips continued to frame a polite smile.

"Anyone who turns the tables on me that well," Leith said, "is entitled to a reward. Now let me see. What can I give you? . . . I guess food would be the best. How about it, Miss Sanders? Can we cook up a little food for Mr. Shogiro?"

"Oh, I think so," she said.

Leith said, "Well, we might at least fry him an egg."

"We haven't any more eggs," Miss Sanders said.

"That's too bad," Leith said, "but — what's this? . . . Oh, yes, our friend, Shogiro, seems to have something else up his sleeve."

Leith picked up Shogiro's forearm, held his coat by the cuff, and shook it gently. Two eggs rolled out.

Leith, juggling the eggs in his hand, said, "That's fine. Now if we had a frying pan. Has anyone in the audience a frying pan?"

In the silence which followed, one of the stewards, who had been coached in the part, called out, "Why don't you look in the fishbowl?"

"An excellent idea," Leith said.

He walked over to the fishbowl, still holding the eggs, reached down, apparently plunging his hand into the water, and brought out a frying pan without in any way disturbing the fish.

"Now," he said, "we're ready. If you'll hold a match for us, Miss Sanders . . ."

He broke both eggs into the frying pan, tossed the shells to one side, held the frying pan over a match which Ora Sanders lighted, shook the pan, and then approached the Japanese. "Here you are," he said.

Sergeant Ackley, in the back row, said to Beaver, "Watch him like a hawk, Beaver. He's getting ready to pull something. He's worked the buildup. Now, he's after blood."

Lester Leith, with the frying pan held rather high so that the Japanese could not see its interior, said, "A plate, please, Miss Sanders."

Ora Sanders picked up a plate from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a table, started toward Leith, and stumbled. The plate slipped from her hands, fell to the floor, and broke into two pieces.

For a moment there was a gasp from the audience, but it was quickly apparent that Ora Sanders's fall had been far too gracefully done to be accidental. She got to her feet, smiled, then stared ruefully at a run in her stocking.

With the quick instinct which is the natural reaction of a woman, she lifted her abbreviated skirt to see how far up the run had gone, then suddenly, as though realizing her position, laughed and dropped the skirt back into place.

Lester Leith said, "That's too bad. Just pick up the fragments of the plate, Miss Sanders, and I'll see what I can do with them."

She picked up the two segments of the plate and handed them to Leith who took them in his left hand, still holding the frying pan in his right hand.

"Oh," he said, "this isn't bad."

Ora Sanders stepped forward, swiftly passing between Leith and the audience. A half second later, Leith gave his left hand a deft twist, and there was the plate unbroken and apparently none the worse for having been dropped!

"Now," Lester Leith said, "we'll put the egg into the plate."

He tilted the frying pan and shook it.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "What's this?"

What came out of the frying pan was not a cooked egg, but a very fine pearl necklace which dangled for a moment on the lip of the frying pan, then dropped with a clatter to the plate which Leith was holding.

Leith dropped the frying pan, picked up the pearl necklace, and said, "What an egg!"

The audience applauded. Leith, as though the trick had been completed, turned back toward the table on which Ora Sanders was rearranging his stage properties.

For a long moment Shogiro stood rigid, the smile frozen on his face. Then he took a quick step toward Leith and said, "Begging honorable pardon, but that is *my* necklace!"

Leith turned to face him, urbanely smiling, holding the necklace in his hand. "Certainly it's your necklace," he said, and handed it to the Japanese.

Shogiro took the necklace, stared at it for a moment, then said ominously, "Begging honorable pardon, but this is not same necklace which came from frying pan."

Leith looked at it and said, "By George, I don't believe it is! It does seem different."

"It is different," Shogiro said. "Begging pardon, this necklace very cheap. Other necklace my property."

Leith said, "Well, there's only one thing for us to do then, and that's put the necklace in the frying pan, and see if we can change it back into the original necklace."

He dropped the necklace into the frying pan, shook it for a moment,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then snatched up the plate which Miss Sanders had placed on the table. He tilted the frying pan over the plate—and what came out was not a necklace, but apparently an omelette.

"Tut, tut," Lester Leith said, "I'm afraid we dropped the necklace into those eggs, and we now have a pearl omelette. Here. I'll wrap it up in a handkerchief, and you can take it with you."

He picked up a silk handkerchief, placed it over the plate, apparently wrapped up the omelette, and handed it to Shogiro.

Shogiro took the handkerchief. He shook it out. It was empty. The plate was empty. With quick, purposeful strides, Shogiro walked over to the table, and snatched up the frying pan. It too was empty.

The audience roared.

Leith, smiling broadly, bowed to the right and left, marking the termination of the act.

Shogiro, standing ominously tense, watched him for several seconds, then without a word turned and walked back to his seat.

Leith looked over the audience. Mah Foy was no longer in the front row, and Silman Shore seemed to have vanished as completely as had the omelette in the handkerchief.

Sergeant Ackley and Beaver sat in their stateroom staring moodily at each other.

"Well," Beaver said, "there it is."

Sergeant Ackley said, "It's plain as the nose on your face. Shogiro had the necklace all the time. Leith knew it. He wanted an opportunity to pick his pockets. If he'd tried to do it surreptitiously, there'd have been hell to pay.

"Beaver, do you realize what it means? It means that everyone figures that necklace was as much a part of Leith's magic show as the frying pan and the fake goldfish bowl. Here we've traveled thousands of miles and organized an elaborate spy system to find out when he was going to steal that necklace, and damned if he doesn't do it *right in front of an audience.*"

Beaver said, "Well, he can't get away from us. We know who has the necklace *now.*"

Sergeant Ackley nodded.

There was a moment of silence, then Beaver said, "What pocket did he get the necklace out of, Sergeant? It was done so quick I couldn't see."

"You didn't see?" Ackley asked.

"No."

Sergeant Ackley frowned at the undercover man. "I thought so," he said. "The whole thing was staged to happen according to schedule. The girl pretended to fall, and dropped the plate. That distracted the attention of the women in the audience. A broken plate is a domestic tragedy to a woman. The men just don't give a damn about a broken plate, so the girl had her stockings fixed so that when she stumbled, she could pull a run in one of them. She ran her hands up along her leg and that grabbed the men's attention. At any rate, it accounted for yours."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I only glanced there for half a second," Beaver said. "As soon as I did, I knew I mustn't take my eyes off Leith, so I looked right back."

"That half second was all he needed," Sergeant Ackley said.

"Well," Beaver insisted, "what pocket *did* he take it out of?"

"Well," Sergeant Ackley said, "it was—"

"I thought so," said Beaver. "You were looking at her leg too."

There was a period of uncomfortable silence, then. Sergeant Ackley said, "Okay, Beaver, we won't try to do anything here. There are too many places on the ship where he can hide it. He's far too clever to keep it in his stateroom, but he won't dare to *leave* it on the ship. When he gets ashore in Honolulu, he'll have it in his baggage, or on him. Now then, Beaver, it's up to you to go through that baggage the minute he hits shore. I'll see to it that he's detained, and you'll have an opportunity."

"Suppose he has it on him?"

Sergeant Ackley laughed grimly and said, "There's lots of ways of playing *that* little game. Beaver, send a wireless to the chief of police at Honolulu. Make it read like this: MAN WHO WILL DISEMBARK FROM MONTEREY WITH WHITE RIBBON PINNED TO CROWN OF HAT WILL HAVE TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS IN DOPE CONCEALED SOMEWHERE IN HIS CLOTHES."

Sergeant Ackley beamed.

"That means they'll search his baggage, and find the necklace," Beaver said.

"No, it won't," Sergeant Ackley observed. "You see, they won't know who it is until they see the white ribbon on the hat. As his valet, you can take his hat and brush it just before he starts ashore. Then is when you'll pin on the white ribbon. They'll search him first. You'll get the baggage through before they find out anything about the setup. When they do, I'll explain to them that it was just a joke on the part of Shogiro who was sore because Leith had made a monkey out of him in front of an audience."

Beaver blinked thoughtfully. "It sounds like a good scheme," he said, "only . . ."

"Only what?" Sergeant Ackley snapped.

"Only I have an idea it won't work," the undercover man blurted.

Leith, lying in a deck chair, enjoyed the tropical ocean breeze. He seemed relaxed, completely at his ease.

Mah Foy slipped into the adjoining deck chair, leaned forward, and spoke in a low voice. "It was Silman Shore who left the social hall," she said.

"Yes, I know," Leith said. "Where did he go, to his stateroom or somewhere else?"

"He went to his stateroom."

"And what did he do? Do you know?"

"Yes," she said. "I could watch him through the window. He made no attempt to conceal what he was doing. He went to his gun case, picked up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his gun, took it out on deck, and started practicing. I strolled by and asked him why he wasn't at the entertainment, and he said that amateurish stuff annoyed him, that he had to put on an exhibition the next day, and he wanted to limber up his muscles."

Leith said, "Most interesting. I think I'll take up skeet shooting. . . . And by the way, tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock when Silman Shore is putting on his exhibition, I think it would be an excellent idea for you to be with the purser, and you'll kindly tell Ora Sanders to hunt up the first mate who has been so attentive to her and spend about an hour with him."

Mah Foy thought for a moment, then she said, "How about Scuttle?"

Leith grinned and said, "Let Scuttle be wherever he pleases."

"And you?" she asked.

Leith smiled. "I think," he said, "that I'll have some business with the captain."

Mah Foy said very gently, "That first necklace — as I glimpsed it hanging on the edge of the frying pan — seemed to be the Empress Dowager's necklace."

"Did it indeed?" Leith said smiling. "An excellent example of optical illusion."

She said, "My first loyalty is to my country. I warn you."

Leith smiled at her. "I wouldn't want it to be otherwise," he said.

It was a calm day with no wind. The sharp prow of the *Monterey* hissed through the water. Passengers, promenading the spotless decks or sprawled lazily in deck chairs, relaxed to the joys of ocean travel.

Katiska Shogiro paced the deck alone. His short, stubby legs propelled his torso with short, vigorous steps. His lips were no longer smiling. When Silman Shore stepped out of the smoking room to lounge against the rail, Shogiro saw him and stopped beside him.

"Excussse pleassse," he said. "You are recollecting last night?"

"What about it?" Shore asked.

"Pardon intrusion upon your honorable thoughts, but did you notice necklace which came from frying pan?"

Shore snapped his fingers. "Bosh!"

"Not bosh," Shogiro insisted. "I am particularly calling attention to necklace which you saw on night of Sansone dinner. Is not look the same?"

"I didn't even look at it," Shore said impatiently. "I hate all that kindergarten stuff. The minute he started pulling that old hokum, I got up and walked out."

"Thanking you very much," Shogiro said, and resumed pacing the deck, but this time his forehead was creased in a definite frown.

Charles Sansone sought out Leith.

"You'll pardon me," he said, "for intruding. I haven't met you. My name's Sansone. I was a very interested spectator at your performance last night."

Leith shook hands and said, "I'm very glad to know you. I'm afraid my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

performance was rather crude, but then, when persons are traveling on shipboard, any form of spontaneous entertainment is interesting."

"I was particularly interested in one phase of your performance," Sansone said.

"Indeed. What was that?"

"When you made the necklace come out of the frying pan."

Leith laughed deprecatingly. "I'm afraid," he said, "I can't explain how that was done."

"I don't want to know how it was done," Sansone said. "I want to know where you got that necklace."

Leith said, laughing, "You didn't think it was composed of genuine pearls, did you?"

"I didn't know," Sansone said. "It looked very much like a necklace I saw at one time. I don't know whether you've read about it or not."

"Read about it?" Leith asked.

"Yes. A necklace which was stolen from Mr. Shogiro — unfortunately at a dinner where I was the host."

"Oh!" Leith exclaimed.

"I'm rather surprised at your surprise," Sansone told him dryly, "inasmuch as you have engaged the young woman who was formerly my secretary, and have apparently cultivated at least a speaking acquaintance with Shogiro."

"Just what are you getting at?" Leith asked. "As far as the necklace is concerned, it was a part of the stage properties which I use in my act."

"Doesn't it impress you as being a remarkable coincidence," Sansone asked, "that a stage property which you acquired at a house dealing in parlor magic would be almost an exact duplicate of a pearl necklace which was worn by the Empress Dowager of China?"

"What the devil are you insinuating?"

Sansone got to his feet. "Nothing," he said, and then added significantly, "as yet. I'm something of a magician myself."

He bowed and walked away.

A deck steward made the rounds of the deck, tapping on the ship's xylophone, and calling out, "Trapshooting on the afterdeck, please. An exhibition of trapshooting by a national champion."

Passengers started getting up from chairs, stretching, yawning, and drifting toward the stern. After a while, the popping of a gun could be heard as blue rocks sailed out over the water, only to vanish into puffs of powder as a charge of well-directed shot struck them.

Silman Shore seemed rather bored by what he was doing. His manner was that it was kindergarten stuff.

Bang! Bang!

There wasn't a single miss.

At length, Shore finished, acknowledged the applause, placed his gun under his arm, and turned back toward his stateroom.

Charles Sansone, walking along the deck said, "Just a word with you, Shore, if you don't mind."

The two men talked together in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

low tones for about fifteen minutes. Together they strolled back to the cabin occupied by the trapshooter. Shore's eyes were narrowed in thoughtful consideration.

"By George," he said, with his hand on the knob of the door, "it doesn't seem possible. Of course, I know some of these gem thieves are pretty slick, but —"

He opened the door and stood on the threshold in dismay. His cabin was a complete mess. Trunks had been opened and the contents of the drawers dumped on the floor. Clothes had been jerked from hangers in the closet and thrown to the far end of the stateroom. Some of the leather bags had actually been cut in an attempt to expose false bottoms.

Sansone said, "What's this?"

Shore said, "I've evidently been robbed."

He entered the stateroom, walked rapidly across to one of the open drawers, took out a roll of currency, and a book of travelers' checks. He faced Sansone significantly. "The one who did it," he said, "wasn't looking for money."

Sansone said, "Come on. We're going to see the captain."

The captain received them in his stateroom, said, "Good afternoon, gentlemen. I wonder if you're acquainted with Mr. Leith, our amateur magician."

Leith was sitting in one of the leather-cushioned chairs.

"You're damn right we're acquainted with him," Sansone said. "He broke into Shore's cabin and — well, he stole —"

"Just a minute," the captain interrupted. "*Who* did you say stole what?"

"Mr. Leith — that is —"

"When was this done?" the captain asked.

Shore said, "Some time in the last half hour. It is now 2:35. I left my cabin at 2 o'clock. It was all right then."

The captain looked at his watch and said, "Mr. Leith has been with me for the last forty-five minutes. We chatted until 2 o'clock when the skeet shooting started. We walked back along the boat deck, saw some of the blue rocks being broken, then came back here, and sat down. Now then, if you gentlemen have anything to report, report it, but I'll thank you to refrain from making any unfounded accusations."

The men exchanged glances. Shore, somewhat crestfallen, said, "Well, someone broke into my cabin and wrecked it looking for something."

"I'll go with you," the captain said, "at once. You'll pardon me, Mr. Leith?"

"Certainly," Leith said.

The three men walked off. A few moments later Leith strolled down to his own cabin. He opened the door, glanced inside, and then walked back down to where the captain was appraising the damage in Shore's stateroom. "Pardon me," he said. "I don't like to interrupt, but if you gentlemen think *this* cabin is a mess, come take a look at mine. . . . "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The island of Oahu showed as a jagged outline against the sky. The ship, passing Koko Head, swung past Diamond Head and the beach at Waikiki.

A short time later the gangplank had been stretched and the passengers, many of them wearing garlands of fragrant leis made of vividly colored tropical flowers, surged down. Beaver said, "Just a minute, your hat, sir."

He took Leith's hat and brushed off an imaginary speck of dust. Surreptitiously pinning a small bow of white ribbon to the crown, he replaced the hat on Leith's head.

A moment later, Leith was swept down the gangplank. As he paused at the foot, a hand touched his shoulder and an official voice said, "One moment, please."

It was an hour later that Sergeant Ackley, accompanied by a jubilant Beaver, walked into a jewelry store in Honolulu.

"We want this necklace of pearls appraised," Sergeant Ackley said. "In fact, you'd better appraise both of them."

The jeweler examined the necklaces, then he looked up at the two men.

"Well?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"Worth about five dollars," the jeweler said.

"For which one?" Beaver demanded.

"For both," the jeweler said.

Stunned, the two conspirators looked at each other, then silently took their spoils to another jewelry store. That jeweler studied the pearls under a magnifying glass, and was even less flattering in his appraisal. "About two dollars apiece," he said.

Leith lolled in the reclining chair on the *lanai* of his suite in the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and glanced out over Waikiki Beach where tourists and beach boys were hissing their way into shore on surfboards.

"This," he said, "is the life."

"Yes, sir," the undercover man observed.

Leith said, "By the way, Scuttle, I ordered a gun today."

"A gun, sir?"

"Yes," Leith said, "a shotgun. I think I may run over to one of the other islands and get in a little shooting. It's rather an expensive gun. I think prices went up because of this international trapshooting contest which is being staged tomorrow. By the way, Scuttle, you'll never guess whom I met this afternoon."

"Who?" the undercover man asked.

"Sergeant Ackley."

"What's he doing over here?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Leith said, "but seeing him has made the Islands suddenly distasteful to me. I've booked passage on the Clipper tomorrow. I'll fly back to the Mainland. Ah, there's a ring at the door. It must be the shotgun."

"You'll hardly be using the shotgun if you're flying back to the Mainland," the undercover man said. "Shall I tell them to take it back?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, no," Leith said. "I told them I'd buy it, and I'll buy it. I'm a man of my word, Scuttle."

The undercover man signed a delivery slip and took it to Leith.

"Quite a beauty, isn't it?" Leith said.

"Indeed it is," the undercover man said worriedly. "Did Sergeant Ackley know you had seen him?"

"Oh, yes," Leith said. "I shook hands with him — although he seemed to want to avoid me. He said he'd been over here for two or three weeks, conferring with the local police department on a forgery case."

The valet started to speak, then checked himself.

The Clipper took off for the Mainland with roaring motors, the hull dripping globules of water which scintillated like diamonds in the sun. Lester Leith waved goodbye to his valet.

That afternoon Silman Shore met an embarrassing defeat in the international skeet shoot, following which he was seen to inspect the gun he had found in his gun case; but he made no comment.

Katiska Shogiro, watching him with glittering eyes, was heard to break into a sudden string of Japanese expletives.

At 5 o'clock that night, May Foy sailed for China. In her purse was a certified check signed by Lester Leith. It bore the words, "Donation to the Chinese cause — less 20 per cent for costs of collection."

It was a week after Beaver's return by passenger ship that Lester Leith, seated in his apartment, heard the sound of authoritative knuckles. The door opened even before Leith could signal his valet. Sergeant Ackley, accompanied by a uniformed officer, Charles Sansone, and Silman Shore, entered the apartment.

"Well, well," Leith said. "Good evening, gentlemen, we seem to be renewing a pleasant shipboard acquaintance. Did you come for —"

Sergeant Ackley said, "We came to make an investigation."

"Of what?" Leith asked.

"You purchased a shotgun while you were in Honolulu?"

"That's right," Leith said.

"Mr. Shore's shotgun was stolen while he was in the hotel in Honolulu. He feels that perhaps, in some unaccountable manner, the thief might have switched shotguns. He wants to see the shotgun which you took away with you on the Clipper."

"Indeed," Leith said, his eyes narrowing. "I think I've had all of Mr. Shore's veiled accusations I care for. If he wishes to make a charge, he can make it in the regular way — and he'd better be prepared to substantiate it."

"I'm not doing this," Shore said sullenly. "It's the sergeant who's responsible."

"Indeed," Leith said, arching his eyebrows. "I'm surprised, Sergeant."

"You needn't be," Sergeant Ackley said. "Just bring out that shotgun."

"I'm afraid that's impossible."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We can get a search warrant," Sergeant Ackley said threateningly.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do you any good," Leith said.

"Don't stall," Sergeant Ackley accused. "You laid yourself wide open, Leith. The idea of a man carrying a shotgun with him on the Clipper!"

Leith smiled. "It *was* rather a foolish thing to do," he said. "Do you know, Sergeant, I became ashamed of myself. I found myself getting enthused when I saw Mr. Shore's performance on the *Monterey*, but after I had a chance to see the wonderful panorama of the Islands unfolded beneath the Clipper, as we flew over Oahu, I realized that I didn't want to indulge in any sport which would mean the taking of life. . . . I waited until the ship was about halfway across, and then pitched that shotgun overboard."

"You threw it overboard!" Shore exclaimed.

"Exactly," Leith said, "and that's why a search warrant would do you no good, Sergeant."

The men exchanged glances. Shore said, "I guess that's all you want of me, Sergeant." He turned and left the apartment. A moment later, Charles Sansone silently followed.

Sergeant Ackley stood staring down at Leith. "Damn you," he said, "you had it all figured out. When you flashed that necklace in your exhibition of magic and Shogiro identified it, Shore got up and dashed to his stateroom. It's significant that he picked up his gun and inspected it. Later on, his stateroom was thoroughly searched by Shogiro, who had tumbled to what happened after he'd searched your stateroom and found nothing. That necklace wasn't concealed *in either place!* There was only one other place it could be, one thing which wasn't in the room when Shogiro searched it — and that was Shore's shotgun. By removing the plate in the end of the butt, there was a hollow where a necklace could easily have been concealed."

Leith blinked. "By George, Sergeant," he said, "a man *could* conceal a necklace there."

"Could and did," Sergeant Ackley said.

Leith lit a cigarette, then looked up at Sergeant Ackley with a disarming smile.

"Clever of you, Sergeant," he said. "Isn't it a shame you didn't think of it before?"

Leith said musingly, "And to think I pitched that gun overboard. Do you *really* think there was any chance the guns could have been substituted, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Ackley fumed.

"Tut, tut," Leith said. "You mustn't be that way, Sergeant. In your profession, it's easy to make mistakes. You must figure things on a give-and-take basis."

Sergeant Ackley's face was twisted with emotion. "Yes," he said, "and you do all the taking."

Following which, he left, slamming the door behind him with great violence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Gladys Cluff's "The Pearly Gates Are Open" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. The story is both sensitive and sincere, but its sentiment does not spill over; and the bite of irony is not lacking. Miss Cluff can write — we shall hear more from her, depend on it.

The author tells us that when she was eleven she lived on a California orange ranch and rode her own donkey to school. During this period she had regular nightmares — mostly from reading and rereading "The Speckled Band" and other classic adventures and memoirs. Under the spell of fictional villainy, she earnestly believed that her two brothers were criminals, and she stalked them with unrelenting persistence. When the brothers rebelled and forced her to desist, she took her revenge by writing a two-year serial story about them — after combining both brothers into a female character named Cornelia! Even after two years of hair-raising and hair's-breadth 'scapes, she couldn't bring herself to kill Cornelia off — because every time her creator took a hot bath and "relaxed" about Cornelia, the character slipped through her knots like a super-Houdini.

Then, later, Miss Cluff lived in Jackson, Michigan where she often spent her Sundays talking to the nice prisoners in Jackson's lively (the author's own word) penitentiary. Once, she remembers, she got lost in a section of the prison inhabited only by lifers, and spent an entranced half hour listening to and sympathising with those quiet men who were far more lost than Miss Cluff . . .

Yes, we shall hear more from her — you can depend on it.

THE PEARLY GATES ARE OPEN

by GLADYS CLUFF

YOUNG MRS. JESSUP, HER EYES lowered nervously against the gritty wind, scurried down Forty-ninth Street with a warm cherry pie for lunch. Even if he did get angry at the extravagance, she just had to do one pleasant thing on such a sinking-down day — a day as gloomy as that morning she first arrived in New York City, four years ago, to be Mr. Jessup's bride in a Garden Single. Which turned out to be a basement. As Mr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jessup turned out to be — well, better not think about that.

Not thinking had been a wonderful discovery. Certain habits of Mr. Jessup's used to upset her so, but she barely noticed them any more. All she had to do was to hum silently, against the roof of her mouth — all the verses of a hymn, for instance — and examine the pictures they made: the mansions, the isles, her own crown with or without jewels in it. Things like that. But there was one thing she knew she would never get used to — cruelty to animals. Boys, maybe, were more ignorant than mean about animals, although they didn't *look* ignorant, and lots of times they did look mean. But a grown man, drunk or not, should know better. Mrs. Jessup felt desperately that if anything like that should happen today she really couldn't bear it.

Her luck almost held. Then within a block of home she had to stop to remove a cinder from her eye. She looked up, blinking, to test whether it was out. And by so slight an accident she noticed the small green truck at the curb, and the skin-and-bones old white horse with its milky eyes beseeching her. Specifically, her. The driver of the truck stood teetering for balance, before climbing down.

At just that moment Mrs. Jessup saw the horse lunge recklessly toward some spilt grain farther out in the street, and the driver was pitched headlong to the sidewalk.

She watched him stagger to his feet, miraculously unhurt but too blindly furious to notice her six feet away. He kicked the horse with all his might, in the animal's stomach. Mrs. Jessup's stomach caved in too.

The horse gave a human scream and waited, shuddering.

And this time Mrs. Jessup just couldn't bear it. Something of herself would die, this minute, if she let this man go on living. But all her training and belief rose up: Thou shalt not kill — not even this man. Well, at least she was going to hurt him back, and hard, too, before he killed that poor horse.

The only weapon handy was her umbrella. It was too flimsy a thing to strike with, so she drove it, absurdly, like a lance.

She aimed at the man's fat back. But he, off balance from the violence of his kick, had stumbled, and in turning, he caught the umbrella's metal tip square on his temple. His great weight leaned against her great anger. Without a sound he sagged into the gutter, and from a little hole in his temple the blood ran and ran, and finally stopped running. And Mrs. Jessup knew, with astonishment and finality, that he was dead.

"I couldn't *bear* it again," she whispered. That was all the excuse she made. Neither pity nor self-horror occurred to her. Only an old fear multiplied: now *everyone* would be against her — they'd want her very life! As a flurry of rain tapped her shoulder, Mrs. Jessup faced around in panic, and then realized she had no time for panic any more. She forced

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

herself to search the street, the cars, the buildings, for eyes that might have seen her do this thing, that might still be watching her.

Forty-ninth Street between First and Second Avenues is a populous block, but just after noon the sidewalks are usually empty. Children were at school or home from school eating lunch, their mothers providentially in the kitchen or also at lunch, as were the old women in shawls who ten minutes earlier would have been out on their doorsteps regardless of showers. Two crosstown buses waited empty at the corner, the slumped backs of their drivers terribly plain and close through the glass front of Riker's Lunch Counter. Even the Sunbright Laundry horses were tossing nose-bags for final oats, their drivers also in Riker's. Three big laundry-wagons hid her crime from busy First Avenue.

So far as she could tell, no one had seen a thing! Of course a hundred windows faced the scene, but Mrs. Jessup knew how little idling went on here at noon hour — she herself lived right around the corner on First.

Automatically she swished her umbrella-tip in the rainwater of the gutter. As she then turned quickly toward home, Mrs. Jessup tried to think out what this meant. "Manslaughter? That's in self-defense, isn't it? They'd never count defending a horse. Or did it mean when you didn't mean to. I didn't expect to, but I wanted to, all right. Is that — yes, I suppose it is. *Murder.*"

"Oh, well, I'll pay for it dear enough," she thought drearily. "Nothing don't come free — or cheap."

Hanging. She remembered in sudden detail an old movie with Greta Garbo climbing a scaffold to be hanged, her hair smothered under a tight black skull-cap. Mrs. Jessup started to run, but knew at once that she mustn't.

And yet she was not wholly fleeing. Terror was not quite all. Heartbeat by heartbeat she also *approached* one heavenly moment. Home, that dark, used-up smelly room that she had regarded as a trap from the moment she stepped into it, loomed larger and more beautiful now with every step she took. And then it occurred to her, "If nobody saw me, why should they suspect me? *I* haven't a vicious temper. Goodness, they're forever telling me I'm too meek."

But she knew they would. They'd come with their questions, and she never could stand up to their bullying. Oh, they'd find out . . .

And then she was home, behind a locked door, and safe!

She sank into such a chair as she had never known existed, and the room *was* big and beautiful. Oh, so beautiful! And then it came to Mrs. Jessup, who was a religious woman, that the wonderful thing about the gates of heaven (she thought of them as The Pearly Gates — "The Pearly Gates Are Open") is not their eventual opening — to receive — but their eventual closing — to make one safe forever.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Twice somebody knocked.

She didn't hear.

Around suppertime the old lady across the hall tucked the evening paper under the Jessup door; they shared the expense. After a long time Mrs. Jessup sat down and opened it.

A paragraph on the twenty-ninth page reported the death of a Circle truck driver, while delivering a consignment of beer to the Elite Delicatessen at 382 East Forty-ninth Street. "Body bruises and condition of clothing indicated that the driver in dismounting had fallen to the pavement where —" Mrs. Jessup looked again "— where he was kicked fatally — the skull was completely crushed — by his horse. Barn men told police the horse was highly nervous. Deceased leaves a widow, Mrs. Elsie Jessup, of 1097 First . . ."

NEXT MONTH . . .

Five prize-winning stories — including:

Joseph Whitehill's STAY AWAY FROM MY MOTHER
Thomas Flanagan's THIS WILL DO NICELY

plus eight other fine tales of crime and detection, including:

Agatha Christie's SHADOW IN THE NIGHT
Thomas Walsh's CALLAHAN IN BUTTONS
Mignon G. Eberhart's NO CRY OF MURDER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stewart Beach has spent most of his life being a writer and an editor. He was graduated from the University of Michigan and shortly afterward taught short-story writing at New York University. His editorial career has been outstanding: managing editor of "The Independent," and editor of "Theatre Magazine" and "House Beautiful." And betweentimes his own short stories appeared in many of the leading magazines.

At the outset of World War II he was given an Army commission and by the end of the war was a Colonel. (We wish we could tell you the nature of Mr. Beach's high-level, top-secret work in the Army; it would stagger you as it staggered us, and we can only hope that some day Mr. Beach's war experiences will find their way, however disguised, into short-story, novel, autobiography, or drama form.) In 1947, he became Executive Editor of "This Week Magazine," a post he still holds; he also serves as "This Week's" fiction editor, selecting stories for more than 10,000,000 American families.

What you have read so far (disregarding our own parenthetical remarks) is merely a cold catalogue of "bare facts." They reveal only a superficial glimpse of the writer-editor-man. To know Mr. Beach is to know an interesting, many-faceted personality, one of the most genuinely charming writer-editors we have ever met — truly, in the full meaning of the phrase, a gentle man.

Mr. Beach's newest story is a tale of detection — modern, realistic, probing. But in the broader sense, it is a story about upper-crust people — what makes them tick, the manner in which they live, and how their ticking and their living can be the storm signals of tragedy . . . the story of people, and how they realized, each in his own way, that there is more than one way to live — and more than one way to die.

STORM WARNINGS

by STEWART BEACH

I SHALL NEVER ERASE FROM MY MIND the climax of that Fourth of July at the Prestons'. But now that I have pieced together the events of the evening and the improbable circumstances that took me to Gray's Neck for the holiday, I can see the somber thread of inevitability which ties everything together. And I am convinced that my decision was right.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Tuesday before the Fourth, I had gone to New York to get signatures on some papers for one of my law firm's most important clients. A clerk's job, really, but we agreed that a partner ought to see it through. The business took no more than an hour on Wednesday morning, and I was at Grand Central in plenty of time to catch the 1 o'clock train home to Boston.

Going to the club car would never have entered my mind if I hadn't bought a mystery novel in the station which introduced me to one of those hardboiled detectives who operate on a diet of whiskey and water. After a string of vicarious highballs I wanted a drink so badly I almost ran the two cars to the bar. You might say that if it hadn't been for the important client and the alcoholic detective I should never have gone to Gray's Neck at all. Because it was in the club car that I saw Laura Preston.

She was sitting alone, with a glass beside her containing nothing stronger than ginger ale, I'm sure, and she was staring at her foot which swung nervously into the aisle. I said, "Well, Laura," and she looked up with that startled, rather frightened expression of a person who has been too quickly sprung from thought. Then the planes of her face relaxed. Laura could be charming when she smiled. "Jeff Thomas!" she said. "Why didn't you let us know you were in New York?"

There was an empty chair beside her, and I sat down and ordered my drink. "Now tell me all about yourself," she demanded when I was settled, "and in three words, because we're almost at my station, and I have to get off."

I lighted a fresh cigarette for her and one for myself. "Nothing to tell," I laughed. "There's your three words. Laura, I haven't seen you since that dinner five years ago. How's Willie?"

Because I was turned toward her I saw the quick frown which she softened to a look of concern. "Willie? He's just the same. I wanted him to come up with me this afternoon, but he said he couldn't get away. You know how Willie is."

I knew about Willie, and what she said didn't mean anything.

Houses and low factories were beginning to blur past the windows now, and Laura said, "Here's my stop. Fisher's meeting me with the car, and I'm driving to the Neck." She started to rise, then pivoted sharply in her chair and put her hand on mine. "Jeff, what are you doing over the Fourth?" Before I could reply she went on quickly, "Come down and spend it with us. Willie would be so pleased."

For just a moment I looked at her hand and noticed how thin it was. Laura had always been too thin. Then we both stood up, swaying as the train curved round and the dome of Rhode Island's capitol came into sight, a burnished golden beehive in the 4 o'clock sun.

"I couldn't make it till Saturday

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afternoon," I said. "But I'll come then. I'd like to see Willie."

I thought Laura seemed genuinely pleased. "There's a Fourth of July dance at the yacht club," she said, "and we're giving a dinner before it. Only people you know. Don't bring anything special — the men never dress any more." She looked out the window as the train slowed, reaching in her bag for a cigarette. "Saturday then, Jeff," she said. I held up my lighter, and she added with unnecessary emphasis, "It will be *good* for Willie to see you."

She hurried toward the end of the car, and I saw her on the platform a moment later with Fisher, the Prestons' chauffeur, touching his cap, picking out her luggage from the neat row the porter had made. Then I sat down again and looked at my drink. I didn't want it any more. When I put out my cigarette I noticed that the ashtray was almost filled with crimson-stained stubs . . .

I could have gone down Friday afternoon. I told myself it was the thought of the holiday traffic which had made me say I couldn't. When I got up on Saturday morning I consoled myself over breakfast by reading about the record traffic jams. But it wasn't just the traffic: I didn't want to spend a long weekend with the Prestons. I couldn't stand seeing too much of what Laura had done to Willie.

My affection for Willie was deep and long. I had known him first in boarding school, and we'd been through four years of Harvard as roommates. Willie was the salt of the earth. He came from some little village in Vermont where his father was a country doctor and the salt of the earth, too, God rest his tired bones.

Willie was that phenomenon which has nothing to do with where you were born or what your parents were. He was a natural leader. He was modest and rather simple, really, with no more than a good, average intelligence. But without ever being conscious of it, he had the trick of command. Men instinctively followed him. Coaches got a dreamy look in their eyes when they spoke of Willie Preston. What he did in sports those four years at Harvard is already a legend.

It was during senior year, when he was captain of the football team, that Willie first met Laura. She had been away at school in Switzerland for two years, so she hadn't been at the debutante parties we dragged Willie to in Boston. I don't mean that he didn't have a good time when he went. Girls swooned over him. But Willie, who was so superbly at ease with men, was shy and rather awkward with girls. In the midst of all their chatter, he simply didn't know what to say.

I have known Laura all my life and I was startled when I realized she was serious about Willie. It seemed frankly preposterous that she would consider marrying a man unless he had the kind of background she had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

always taken for granted. Even as a child, I thought she was too conscious of her father's money and position. Now, at twenty, she had grown tall and regal looking, and to her pride had been added a willfulness that was apparent in the line of her chin, the set of her mouth. At times she could appear almost ruthless.

Willie never talked to me about her, but it was easy to see that he was impressed. At first he must have been only pleased by her attention. Then, when he had to accept the fact that her telephone calls and her invitations had a purpose behind them, I think he was overwhelmed by the idea that a girl like Laura would be interested in a country boy like Willie Preston.

Well, why was she? Here was a big, handsome man — a college hero. Was that enough? With her family and beauty, too, Laura could have had almost any man she wanted. Perhaps that was too easy. Perhaps, sensing the respect Willie commanded, she felt an irresistible compulsion to rule him. It was that perverse urge some women have to mold a man. The Boston male was already formed by generations of tradition. Laura saw in Willie a man to be shaped by her own thin, aristocratic hands.

They were married a week after Willie's graduation in June 1936. I was best man at the wedding. The molding began right after the honeymoon when Laura decided they must live in New York and her father arranged a partnership for Willie in one of the best brokerage firms. I don't believe Willie had ever quite thought through what he wanted to do with his life; but he didn't belong in Wall Street.

Whenever I was in New York I went to see them in that big Park Avenue apartment. In those first months after their marriage, Laura was very tender with Willie. But it was the sort of watchful tenderness a managing mother might show toward a child. Subtly but firmly she was trying to make him into her kind of man. Willie, in his big, good-natured way, didn't notice that she was gently correcting him. But by the end of the second year it seemed to me he had grown wary, fearful of offending Laura's rigid standards. Often, when I sat in their living room, I saw Laura's eyes following him — *as if she were appraising her progress.*

What saved Willie then was that he joined the cavalry outfit to which a good many important young men in New York have always belonged. Laura was quite pleased. Willie rode extremely well, and I suppose she found a certain pride in his easy, natural grace sitting a horse. Probably it never crossed her mind that Willie's squadron was part of the National Guard. I've heard she was indignant for a time when the Guard was called into Federal service in the autumn of 1940. But for Willie it was salvation.

I saw him when he was home on leave, just before I went overseas in 1943. He was a major then, assigned to one of the new armored divisions,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and he was Willie as he had been before he married Laura — confident, tough as a saddle, happy because he was doing something he understood. I think that was the only period when he and Laura were really close. She had relaxed her watchfulness completely when I saw them together. Willie was living up to what her code said a man should do in war.

After we all came back, I wondered why Willie hadn't stayed in. He was made for the Army, and the Army was made for Willie. Instead, he returned to the slow death of Wall Street and the stiff, carefully selected dinners Laura gave in the Park Avenue apartment.

The last time I had seen him was at one of those dinners, five years before. It almost tore my heart out. Willie's laugh was a little too loud. Certainly he was drinking too much. And in front of him once more was Laura's appraising eye. I thought grimly that she hadn't succeeded in making him the man she wanted him to become, and I realized why. She had given him no room for his pride to grow. He was out of place in a polished world, and she didn't see it. I don't suppose a woman like Laura ever could . . .

My mind was grooved into the long playing-record of memory as I drove down to Gray's Neck that afternoon of the Fourth, and I felt uneasy about the reality I should find. It was 5 o'clock when I turned between the stone gateposts of the big place Laura had bought. Fisher appeared from somewhere as I got out of the car and he took charge of my suitcase. "Mrs. Preston is on the terrace," he told me. "You can go straight through the house."

There were a dozen people in bathing suits out there having cocktails. Laura separated herself and came toward me, waving a cigarette and drawing me into the party. The husbands and wives were all familiar till I came to a honey blonde, who seemed to be someone's house guest. "*Dar*ling, you look so civilized," she purred, inspecting me coolly. "You make me feel positively undressed."

I never know what to do with a woman like that. "I've just driven down from Boston," I told her a little stiffly, and said I'd have beer in response to a question from Dr. Bob Barry, who seemed to be in charge of drinks. "Where's Willie?" I asked him.

Bob nodded his head toward the Bay as he opened a can of beer and handed it to me. "Willie brought Laura in after the race and then decided to go fishing," he said. For just a minute his eyes held mine. "You seen Willie lately?" he asked.

I shook my head and waited for him to say more. But all he said was, "You will," rather grimly, and picked up a pitcher of martinis. I looked over toward the gray wooden pier of the yacht club where the fleet of Gray's Neck twelve-footers was moored. On the neatly graveled path which ran from the clubhouse down to the pier, youngsters were indus-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

triously setting off firecrackers in defiance of the law. I could hear them echo all around the harbor. Two sea gulls rose from the guard rail of the pier, screaming angrily as they flew low over the water and then gained altitude till they were soaring effortlessly.

The honey blonde came over, and I sorted her out as belonging with the Keatings — someone they had met on a cruise. But all the time we talked I kept an eye on Laura, and always her eyes were straining out toward the Bay.

It was after 6 when we saw the sail of Willie's boat rounding the point. Laura's voice stopped in mid-sentence and then picked up a whole key higher. The wind always died in late afternoon off Gray's Neck, and it seemed to take hours for the boat to get up to its mooring. I heard the squeak of the block, the clatter of the rings as the sail came down, and I could see Willie, immense in that small cockpit, fussing with the gear.

Everyone was leaving now, and I stood with Laura. I saw her lips tighten at Willie's careless seamanship. "He's leaving the boat in terrible shape," she snapped. I was surprised at Willie, too, but I said protectively, "It doesn't really matter. It isn't going to storm on a night like this."

"You never know," Laura murmured, "so you put the boat away as though a hurricane might be coming."

We watched Willie pull the skiff alongside, get into it clumsily, and start rowing back to the float. I felt a sudden surge of warmth. "Mind if I go along and meet him?" I asked, and Laura said, "If you want to." She turned toward the house. "I'm going in and dress. Tell Willie dinner's at 7:30."

It wasn't more than a hundred yards across the Preston's lawn to the yacht club pier, and I got there just as Willie was pulling up the skiff on the float and making rather hard work of it. He was dressed in shorts, and as he turned I could see how much of his hard bigness had gone soft. The face was jowly, and the eyes, until they saw me, held a deadness that was frightening.

"Willie! *Willie!*" I called, as I ran out on the pier, and then he was starting up the steps. "Jeff!" he said simply. "Jeff boy."

All the warmth of that big, wonderful guy came over me as he pawed my hand. I looked at his face, so eagerly pleased, and I think I wanted to cry. We walked back to the house with Willie trying to talk and both of us realizing we had nothing to say. Our friendship didn't belong here at Gray's Neck with Laura upstairs dressing.

Willie stopped on the terrace and looked at the cocktail things which one of the maids was clearing away. "How about a drink to take upstairs?" he asked, sort of hopefully.

I started to say no. Then I thought of Laura and I said almost defiantly, "We've got a minute. Let's drink a martini here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Good boy!" Willie said, and slopped the gin and vermouth into the pitcher without measuring. "Cold and dry," Willie said, holding out a glass and lifting his in salute. "Cheers," he proposed.

"Cheers — and to *us*," I said firmly.

He stood for a moment, looking out over the Bay. The last breath of wind had gone and the water was glassy. Willie said, "Jeff," and I turned to him questioningly. "Remember the war when we ran into each other in that village outside Munich?"

Of course I remembered. It was the spring of '45 and I was setting up a Military Government headquarters when I heard tanks clattering down the road. There was a jeep in front, and suddenly the officer beside the driver threw up his arm. The column halted while he got out and ran over to me. It was Willie, tall and lean and hard, with a colonel's eagle stenciled on his helmet. We talked for minutes only, but the memory was clean in my mind.

"Whatever made you think of that?" I asked.

"Because," he said, "that was the last time you ever saw me."

I started to protest. I had seen Willie a dozen times the first few years after the war. But then I knew what he was thinking about. "Come on," I said. "We'd better go up and dress."

The tempo of the evening was established the moment Laura swept down the stairs, looking quite regal, quite beautiful, and inwardly furious. She must have been giving Willie an acid briefing on his expected behavior for the evening.

The line of her mouth softened when she saw me in the living room. "I'm putting you with the Keatings' guest," she said, as she walked around the room poking at flower arrangements.

"The honey blonde?" I asked. "Isn't she a little gamey for Gray's Neck?"

Laura stubbed out a cigarette and took another. "I don't know why people won't learn you can't mix everybody into a tight little community like this," she complained, and walked toward the kitchen. "I'm going to see if the maids want to go to a movie after dinner."

Cars started arriving, and Willie came downstairs slowly. I wondered if he had been drinking in his room, but he gave no sign of it when he greeted people. We were to be ten. When the Keatings appeared with their guest, looking very cute in something white and lowcut, I walked over and tried to take charge.

"Hello," I said. "You've been given to me for the evening."

There was that cool look again. "People usually have to earn me by being dreadfully amusing," she said. "Are you amusing?"

"No, not very," I said uncomfortably, and then Willie came up.

"Well, *there* you are," she said to him. "Why weren't you here this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afternoon?" Willie seized her arm and walked her over to replenish her drink. I looked toward Laura, but for once her back was turned.

During dinner I got on surprisingly well with my blonde. She became quite cozy and talked a great deal of agreeable nonsense about the Caribbean cruise where she had met the Keatings. But I couldn't escape the feeling that dinner was just an interlude. Everyone was behaving too properly, and by that I guess I mean Willie. He sat at the head of the table talking with Bob Barry's wife. It was only when his laugh was a little too loud that you could tell he wasn't quite sober. The heat was oppressive in that room, and I was glad when we could go out on the terrace for coffee.

Intermittently there were the flat, muffled explosions of firecrackers around the harbor. Now and then a trial skyrocket gleamed weakly in the early dusk. "I thought you couldn't have fireworks in Massachusetts," my blonde said. "You can't," I assured her. "What you hear must be the locals backfiring their outboard motors." She laughed cooperatively. "Get me a highball, would you, Jeff?" she asked. When I came back she was perched on the arm of Willie's chair.

Laura caught my eye, and I tried dutifully to move my blonde. She shook her head. "I like Willie," she said. "He's cute."

When we could hear the music beating from the yacht club, Laura marshaled us toward the cars. "Why don't we walk?" I asked. "It's just across the lawn." But Laura protested, "The grass is wet, Jeff. I don't want to ruin a new pair of slippers. Where's Willie?"

Willie had already gone with the Keatings, so I drove Laura in her car and danced with her until someone cut in. The floor was filled with people I knew, and it must have been well over an hour before I got back to Laura.

"You haven't seen Willie, have you?" she asked when I cut in.

"He was right here a minute ago," I lied, and looked around the room. It was quite evident that Willie wasn't there now. With all that height you couldn't miss him.

"Let's go outside," Laura said abruptly, breaking from me and making for the door. I caught up with her and took her arm. It was taut with determination.

"Give me a cigarette," she said, and I lighted it for her. Her eyes were angry in the flare, and I said uncomfortably, "Why don't we sit here for a while and cool off?"

"You can if you want to," she almost spat out. "I'm going to find Willie."

I followed her down the graveled path, and we found Willie almost immediately. He was sitting on one of the benches beside the pier. The blonde was with him, both arms around his neck. Willie wasn't touching her. He was staring straight ahead at the water.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Laura swept up to them. "*Willie!*" she said imperiously. Just that one word.

He didn't even look up. I disengaged the arms of the blonde and tucked one under my own. "Let's you and me go for a walk," I said, and she looked up with hazy recognition. "Hello," she murmured. "Are you going to amuse me now?"

At the club I turned her over to Jim Keating and went back down the path. I could hear the machine-gun bursts of Laura's voice as I approached the bench but I didn't care. "Maybe this is none of my business," I broke in, "but why don't I drive Willie home?"

Laura surprised me by saying, "That's the best idea anyone has had yet." She rose to her feet and walked stiffly up the path.

Willie and I didn't talk as I led him to the car. Back at the house I started for the stairs with him, but he stopped me.

"It's all right, Jeff," he said, and his voice wasn't as thick as I had expected it to be. He sank into a chair heavily. "I'll just sit here for a while. You go along back and find Laura."

"There's no hurry," I said. "She'll be with somebody."

"Remember what I said about the last time you saw me?" Willie asked abruptly. "I don't suppose you knew what I meant."

I thought for a minute. "Yes, I knew," I told him.

Willie sighed wearily. "After the war was over I wanted to stay in the Army," he said. "That was where I really fitted, Jeff. Laura wouldn't let me. She said it was no life for a man in peace." He was silent and then he repeated the word. "Peace. Funny, Jeff. The war was peace for me."

His eyes closed, and I waited till I was sure he was asleep. Then I took the car and went back to the yacht club.

Laura was waiting for me. "He's asleep in a chair in the living room," I told her. She nodded. "I don't want to dance," she said. "Let's go and sit on the pier."

We walked down the graveled path and sat on the steps leading to the float. "Go ahead and talk if it makes you feel better," I said.

Her voice came quickly, tight with anger. "I thought when I told him you were coming he'd behave himself, Jeff. But he doesn't care." She knotted her fist. "He's been doing this ever since he came back from the war. He doesn't care how he humiliates me!"

All I could think of was the wreck she had made of that glorious guy. "I can't get *through* to him any more — not anywhere," she went on, and it was almost as though she were talking to herself. "Why does he do it? Why, why, *why?*"

I turned to her, and her eyes held a desperation I had never seen before. I thought for a minute that cold woman was going to lose control of herself. There was nothing I could do to help her. "If you don't understand, no one can tell you," I said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She put her head down and covered her face with her hands. "I think I hate him," she said tensely. "I hate him for what he's done to my life!"

After a while she looked up, asked me for a cigarette, and sat there stiffly while we both smoked and looked out over the water. There was no moon, but the sky was a dappled meadow of summer stars. You could hear the gentle lap, lap, as the float rose and fell.

I saw Laura staring down intently. "The water's firing," she said suddenly. "That means a storm by morning."

I could see the phosphorescent fireworks of plankton beneath the surface. Then I looked at the sky. "What kind of weather nonsense is that?" I asked. "It's a beautiful night."

Laura shook her head. "When the water fires, it means a storm." She straightened. "I told Willie he shouldn't have left the boat that way," she said angrily. "If we have a blow the sail will be torn to ribbons."

"I'll fix it," I said impatiently, "if it will make you feel happier," and went down to find the skiff on the float.

All the way rowing out I could see Laura sitting on the steps, her outline melting more and more into the background of the pier. But the red dot of her cigarette was constant. Once I saw the coal arch out like a miniature skyrocket and die in the water. Almost immediately there was the quick flare of her lighter and, again, the red glow. Then I lost it when the skiff nosed in among the boats, and I began looking for the Prestons' mooring.

Willie had left the boat in terrible condition. He had tied only one stop around the sail. Half of it was trailing in the cockpit. I found an empty gin bottle and put it over the side. It must have taken me a good twenty minutes to get everything shipshape. When I shoved off and looked over my shoulder to line up the pier, I saw Laura's cigarette like a beacon.

She got up from the steps as I pulled the skiff onto the float. "Thanks, Jeff," she said. "Let's go back to the clubhouse. I'm getting cold." Her hand was trembling when she took my arm.

The party was nearly over. We went inside and danced silently the few minutes till the music ended. Then there was the usual flourish of good-nights while walking out to the cars. I looked for the blonde, and the Keatings dug her out from the back seat of their convertible where she was asleep. Laura shuddered slightly, and we got into her car. "I hope Willie's gone up to bed," I said, as we swung into the drive.

Willie hadn't gone up to bed. He was sitting in the living room just where I had left him. But his head lolled to one side of the big chair, and there was a round hole in his temple. On the floor beside him lay a small German pistol he had brought back from the war.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Instinctively I threw my arm across the door to keep Laura out. But it was too late. She pulled my arm down and stood there rigid. Then she sank to the floor with a single retching sob.

I was quite certain he was dead, even before I touched his hand. I went to the phone and made two calls, one to the local chief of police and the other to Bob Barry. "You'd better come over — and bring your doctor's bag," I told Bob unnecessarily. "It looks as though Willie has shot himself."

Bob and Molly Barry arrived within seconds of the police car. Laura had dragged herself to her feet by that time and was standing in the terrace door, not looking at Willie. Molly ran across the room and put her arm around her.

The chief looked at Bob. "Better see if he's dead," he said.

Bob made his doctor's examination and gave a formal pronouncement. The chief nodded. "Medical examiner will be along in a minute, but I thought I'd better be sure straight off." He looked around the room a little uncomfortably. "I'd like to talk with Mrs. Preston," he said, "but maybe someone else can sort of fill me in first."

I took him into the dining room and told him everything I could about the evening — there was nothing to hide — and enough about the relationship between Laura and Willie to establish a motive for suicide. I told him about bringing Willie home and what the last words he said to me had been. The chief nodded. "Expect after you left he woke up, got that gun and just shot himself," he said. "Probably thought it was easier all around." He paused. "Know where he kept the gun?"

"Mrs. Preston says it was always in the desk," I told him.

The chief got up. "I'd better talk to Mrs. Preston now," he sighed. "It's just for the record. You've accounted pretty much for everything. Plain case of suicide, I'd say. Pity."

I brought Laura into the dining room. She was dry-eyed as she sat down. "If you don't mind, Mr. Thomas," the chief said, and nodded toward the door. I went out and closed it. Bob and Molly were standing just outside on the terrace. There was no use joining them. None of us wanted to talk.

I heard an ambulance siren and let the medical examiner in. When the chief emerged with Laura, the doctor was just finishing. "Suicide, I'd say," he announced. "Man's been dead about an hour. If anyone heard the shot we could fix the time exactly."

"With firecrackers going off all around the harbor we wouldn't have recognized a shot if we'd heard it," I pointed out.

The chief nodded. "Not supposed to have fireworks. Pretty hard to stop, though. Now if there had been anyone in the house —"

Laura made an impatient gesture. "I've already told you there was no one," she said. "Fisher had instruc-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions to take the maids into New Bedford for a movie as soon as they cleaned up dinner."

"Well, that's it then, I guess," the chief said.

"Will you want me any more?" Laura asked, and the chief said, "No, ma'am — at least, not now. There'll have to be an inquest, of course, but there can't be much question about the verdict. I expect we'll find Colonel Preston's fingerprints on the gun."

Laura went back to the dining room and Molly followed her, closing the door. The men from the ambulance carried Willie out. "Better give me your phone number in Boston, in case I want you for anything," the chief said to me. "I've already got Dr. Barry's."

When he had gone, Bob and I went into the dining room. Laura was sitting there, swinging her foot nervously, her chair at right angles to the table. Molly stood beside her, a damp ball of handkerchief in her hand. "You'll have to drive me home while I get a bag," she said to Bob. "I'm going to spend the night here."

I heard the screen door slam as they went out. Laura was staring at the polished surface of the table. "I suppose you blame me for this," she said after a while.

I looked down at her and was about to speak when my eyes held on the foot she was swinging. She was wearing a coral-colored linen slipper, and the fabric was darkly discolored with moisture. I remembered what she had said earlier in the evening: *The grass is wet, Jeff. I don't want to ruin a new pair of slippers.* Then the whole hideous truth burst upon me.

Abruptly I walked into the living room with my thoughts in turmoil. I had told the chief that Laura was sitting on the pier all the time I was on the Prestons' boat. But she hadn't been. Some time after I disappeared among the boats she had run the hundred yards to the house — *through lush, wet grass.* She had found Willie asleep in the chair, taken that German pistol from the desk, and shot him. I suppose she had remembered to wipe the gun and close his fingers around it so that it would show his prints. Then she had run the hundred yards back and been there on the pier when I rowed back.

Through the dining-room door I could see her now, head bowed, and I wondered what her tortured mind could be thinking. I walked in and stood in front of her. She looked up and saw that I was watching her foot. She stared at it intently. Then her head came back and I could see alarm in her eyes before I walked out and up the stairs.

It took me no more than five minutes to pack my suitcase. Laura was waiting for me when I came down. "Why are you leaving?" she demanded in a high voice.

I looked her full in the eyes. "Because," I said, "I know now that you were not on the pier all the time I was on your boat."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She did not turn away. "You couldn't prove it," she said defiantly. "You saw that my slippers are wet. I could have walked through grass in a dozen different places tonight."

"But you didn't," I said. "The drive of this house is crushed bluestone. The car park at the club is gravel. The path from the clubhouse to the pier is gravel. The grass that soaked your shoes was your own lawn — when you ran across it to take your own sort of revenge on Willie."

She stiffened at the directness of the words. "That's a lie!" she cried harshly. "That's a lie, I tell you. Willie shot himself. The chief of police and the medical examiner both said so."

I said, "That was before they knew what I'm going to tell them."

She whirled to face me. "You *wouldn't!*"

"I've no choice," I said flatly. "I'd be withholding information if I didn't. Then it's up to them."

The strength seemed suddenly to drain from her. "You'd ruin my life," she moaned. "What sort of friend are you?"

"Willie's friend," I said. I looked at her and I never felt so incapable of pity. "I had a law school professor who liked to say, 'The wages of sin is publicity.' Well, I guess that can be a punishment of sorts. I don't think a court could ever convict you. But all your life people will look at you and wonder: *Did she?*"

Her eyes closed while I spoke but when they opened they were hard again — hard and bitter. "Go on."

"What more is there to say?" I asked. "Maybe you did Willie a kindness when you killed him. You'd killed everything else in him long ago. I suppose in some twisted way you realized that down on the pier tonight. So you shot him."

The lights of a car flowed past the window. "Here's Molly," I said. "You'd better not undress. The chief may be back."

I drove to the police station and spent an hour with the chief. He listened gravely while I talked. "Pretty slim evidence for a murder charge," he said when I had finished. "You were right to come and tell me, though. I'll go back and question her again and pick up those shoes. But what's to prevent her saying she was walking around the lawn at the clubhouse while you were taking Colonel Preston home?"

"Nothing," I admitted. "Except that she wasn't." I stood up to go. "Will this come out at the inquest?"

The chief rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "I guess it'll have to. We'll want you to testify. Papers are bound to get hold of it. Pity."

I felt no pity as I went out. I thought of Willie.

The sky was clouding fast, shrouding the stars. A gusty northeast wind had blown up, and I shivered in the sudden chill. As I walked to my car I felt the first stinging spatter of rain.

Laura had been right about the storm.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

SO MANY STEPS TO DEATH *by AGATHA CHRISTIE* (DODD, MEAD, $2.75)	". . . all-out extravagant spy-melodrama . . . every word of it is a joy." (AB)	". . . thoroughly satisfying. B plus." (LGO)
THE CASE OF THE TALKING BUG *by THE GORDONS* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	". . . skilfully constructed combat between criminal ingenuity and police technique." (DD)	"Technical background superb, suspense beautifully handled . . ." (LGO)
THE MEAN STREETS *by THOMAS B. DEWEY* (SIMON & SCHUSTER, $2.50)	". . . the best fictional account yet on juvenile delinquents . . ."(DBH)	". . . a really hard-hitting yarn . . . lively and absorbing . . ." (H-M)
IMPACT OF EVIDENCE *by CAROL CARNAC* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	"Rugged winter setting, unique plotting, minute detecting." (DD)	"The background is interesting and folksy — the solution clever." (FC)
CLEAN BREAK *by LIONEL WHITE* (DUTTON, $2.75)	". . . brilliant climax . . . keeps the reader guessing up to the last minute." (FC)	". . . details are interesting, and the events . . . are action-filled." (LGO)
DEATH IN LILAC TIME *by FRANCES CRANE* (RANDOM, $2.75)	"Pretty good plot, marred by too melodramatic a conclusion. Smooth." (AdV)	"Highway cops do heavy work; first-to-third person shift unhappy. So-so." (SC)
MUCH ADO ABOUT MURDER *by FRED LEVON* (DODD, MEAD, $2.75)	". . . premise overstrains credulity . . . entertaining novelty." (AB)	". . . good for a first novel . . . light-hearted, ingeniously plotted . . ." (H-M)

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*
FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*
SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*
DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key at bottom gives sources.

THE BEST THAT EVER DID IT *by ED LACY* (HARPER, $2.50)	". . . completely fresh . . . hard-paced action and warm human observation . . ." (AB)	". . . characters are superb . . . believable and exciting . . . don't miss this one." (LGO)
BONES IN THE BARROW *by JOSEPHINE BELL* (MACMILLAN, $2.50)	". . . highly talented writer . . . a fascinating and astonishingly palatable story . . ." (AdV)	"High IQ stuff, with credible cast, good detection, fast action. A-1." (SC)
PAINT THE TOWN BLACK *by DAVID ALEXANDER* (RANDOM, $2.75)	"First rate writing and pace." (FC)	". . . neatly plotted, deftly written and moves along at an exhilarating quickstep." (H-M)
FALSE COLORS *by RICHARD POWELL* (SIMON & SCHUSTER, $2.50)	". . . dialogue sparkles . . . clever variations on familiar artistic frauds . . ." (AB)	". . . tone is frolicsome with an undertone of grimness . . . highly agreeable." (AdV)
THE MAN IN THE GREEN HAT *by MANNING COLES* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	". . . the light Hambledonian touch is still evident . . . one of Coles's best recent books." (AB)	"Usual pleasant spoofery, with grand scenery, fast action." (SC)
LOVE CAN BE DANGEROUS *by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN* (MACMILLAN, $2.75)	". . . rather less than medium among . . . Cohen's novels, but still fun." (AB)	"Dope, gems, comely dames abound; assembly-line plot and treatment. Not too lively." (SC)
THE MASK OF ALEXANDER *by MARTHA ALBRAND* (RANDOM, $3.00)	". . . burdened with sentimentality and a colorless writing style." (FC)	"Nice travelogue; familiar props, including models, love interest." (SC)

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*
DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*
LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

We welcome Wade Miller in their first appearance in the pages of EQMM — with an engaging tale of a modern knight in shining armor, a modern damsel in distress, and, of course, a dragon — a very modern dragon, indeed. . . . You will have noted that we referred to Wade Miller and "their" first appearance in EQMM. Like the names Q. Patrick and Ellery Queen, the name Wade Miller stands for a criminological collaboration. The source of the joint pseudonym is simplicity itself: no fancy work, just down-to-earth, realistic fusion: take the surname of Robert Wade, add the surname of William Miller, and presto! — Wade Miller.

The boys (and it is remarkable how male writing teams, no matter how old or young the individual members may be, are always called "the boys"; for example, Q. Patrick and your Editors have been "juveniles" lo these twenty-odd years) . . . as we started to say, the boys are almost identical twins in their backgrounds and careers. They were both born in 1920. They first met in junior high school in San Diego and almost immediately began writing together. This went on through high school and college, until the outbreak of World War II. Then the two of them enlisted — in order to stay in the service together. But the Air Force had different ideas: Bob Wade spent most of his sergeancy in North Africa and Italy; Bill Miller spent most of his sergeancy — the identical rank, you notice — stateside and in Manila. But despite the Air Force, despite geography and chronology, the twinship continued: while still in the service, mind you, and while thousands of miles apart, Bob and Bill collaborated by mail on their first mystery novel, DEADLY WEAPON. *Now, that's Collaboration — with a capital C!*

Today the boys and their families live in the same neighborhood — indeed, on the very same knoll in Spring Valley, near San Diego. They share the same office in nearby La Mesa, in a deserted theater. And their families are amazingly — no, incredibly! — twinlike: one wife apiece, one eight-year-old daughter apiece, and one baby son apiece!

As a 'tec team, Wade Miller has written nearly twenty novels, including that fine series about detective Max Thursday. Their prize-winning story, "Invitation to an Accident," is their first mystery short — in fact, their first literary venture outside the novel field. So we ask you, boys: how about a Max Thursday short story especially for EQMM?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INVITATION TO AN ACCIDENT

by WADE MILLER

PERHAPS ALBERT MAGNUM WAS STILL unmarried because he had never rescued a damsel in distress. Certainly everyone who mattered liked him, whenever they noticed him. They admired his slim grace, his courtly manners, even his precise mustache, but no one ever seemed to see the cavalier gleam in his eyes. It was a reflection of the burning gallantry in his heart. He was one of those rare men who could see nothing especially funny about Don Quixote. Womanhood he worshipped, and he was a perennial escort, but he preferred a woman to be on his arm rather than in his arms.

A hot wind was blowing out to sea the night Albert Magnum came to dine with the Ponds. It parched and rustled everything in its path, respecting nothing, although Bedsole Drive is the oldest and most staid neighborhood in Orchestra Beach, possibly in all San Diego. The wind made Magnum himself feel uncommonly like a dry leaf, lost and purposeless. Being a bachelor past 40 has its moody moments.

Yet he smiled bravely as he rang the bell of what was still known as "the old Skillet house." Virgilia, whose surname had been changed to Pond for two years, answered the door in person. "Albert!" she welcomed her old friend. And he did feel old tonight, despite her twinkling and beaming at him in the entry hall. The slender hands to which he relinquished his hat looked so much younger than his own, although Virgilia and he had grown up together on Bedsole Drive.

"As lovely as ever," he complimented her. "I don't believe you've changed since our first dancing class. Tell me your secret." His bow lacked much of its usual flourish. Tonight he wasn't too eager to expose the bald spot on top of his head.

"My secret?" said Virgilia with a squeak of anxiety. Then she laughed quickly in relief and understanding. "Oh, your same old chivalry." She led him along the hall. He was disappointed: not a word from her to halt time in its flight.

Well, perhaps marriage kept a woman young, and this was Virgilia's second. She was willowy and pallid and her chestnut hair was extremely fine in texture. With her fragile features, the total effect was that of centuries of choice inbreeding, but it was actually the result of strict dieting and sedulously keeping out of the sun. She was one of the hardware Skillets and her grandfather had come to California with his wares in a wagon. Remembering this was some comfort to Albert Magnum since his *great*-grandfather had arrived by ship and, furthermore, had owned the ship; its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

figurehead could be seen on display any afternoon in the very museum where Albert sat on the board of directors.

"It's been ages!" Virgilia was saying, with more excitement than seemed necessary. "Since we've even spoken, Albert — more than to say hello, I mean. You've met my husband, haven't you? Joseph thought he and I were keeping to ourselves much too much. He insisted I shouldn't forget life-long friends simply because of marriage and — well, here you are!"

Here he was, in the living room. The grand old carved furniture looked the same, he was glad to see, polished and permanent. Just think, last week he had almost forgotten that he had ever taken the sweet Virgilia Skillet dancing or boating or picnicking; tonight he was dining with Virgilia Pond. And between these two eras, she had been Mrs. Campbell Bedsole. A pity that Virgilia had seen fit to give up the Bedsole name. After all, great-great-grandfather Bedsole had come to Orchestra Beach even before the Magnums, and it had been a Bedsole who built the pier and bandstand for Sunday afternoon concerts over the ocean. Of course, the bandstand had been an abandoned sinking derelict for a full generation now, and certainly the present Campbell Bedsole was not one to confine his charm to a wife, but nevertheless Virgilia shouldn't have . . .

When Joseph Pond shook hands he hurt Albert Magnum's fingers. Pond managed to be hearty without smiling. He said, "You've got a choice, Al. Manhattan or whiskey?"

"Would you have any port?" Luckily, the Ponds did, so Magnum drank port as his father had, and Virgilia subsisted on several manhattans, and Pond drank his whiskey unadulterated by anything except a single ice cube.

Pond was quite cubical, a heavy ruddy man with a grainy complexion like red sandstone. He had hair along the outer edges of his hands. Magnum recognized him from the Yacht Club where some referred to him as "young Pond" only because he had made all his own money, and because he hadn't even been born in Southern California, much less on Bedsole Drive in Orchestra Beach. He was in real estate. Magnum, while keeping up his third of the small talk, decided that pretty, vivacious Virgilia was wasted. She would have been better off with the profligate Cam Bedsole who at least pretended to add water to his whiskey.

Pond crushed the small talk with, "What's this I read about the mural at your museum, Al? A bunch of naked women or something."

"Oh, you know the newspapers." Magnum smiled like a martyr. "The mural was simply unsuitable, that's all." The mural, as contracted for, had been intended to show the activities of the original San Diego Indians, but not as the artist had depicted them.

"Absolutely undressed?" inquired Virgilia with unsuitable interest. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was probably the manhattans that brought the eager glow to her pale eyes. "Really now, why haven't I read about that?"

"Well," said Magnum uncomfortably, "the men wore codpieces, I suppose you'd call them." As for what the women wore, he was at a loss. He wasn't a very physical person. When driven to mention any of the usually clothed parts of the body, he would seek refuge in a euphemism, such as "tummy" instead of "stomach" or "abdomen" or, Heaven forbid, "belly." But, recalling those Indian girls, he was stuck for a decent term.

"Mixed company, yet," commented Pond. "I guess you were the one who blackballed it."

"There were two of us forthright enough to cast vetoes." The other was old Mrs. Bedsole, bless her. She was 85.

Virgilia sighed. "A shame," she said. "I mean, a shame that Joseph hasn't time to serve on any civic committees. But he works so hard now that he's scarcely ever home. I can't make him slow down."

"I believe in getting things done, dear." Pond gestured impatiently with one stubby hand. "In your shoes, Al, I'd either hang the mural or hang the artist."

The wind raised its voice then and some massive object struck the rear of the house a resounding blow. Magnum started but he was grateful for the interruption. "What was that — a tree?" It had sounded more like The Fall of the House of Usher: enter Lady Madeline, fresh from her tomb.

"No. I've had painters refinishing the back end of this place. They left their scaffolding up on the second floor, like fools. Guess they didn't expect the wind to come up."

During dinner, Pond discussed sewage. This was in connection with the property values of an adjacent district where the voters stubbornly preferred their septic tanks to progress in the form of a bond issue. Pond was for progress, property values, and sewers, no matter what the cost was — to others. Virgilia tried to divert the conversation to the improvements her husband had made about the house and grounds. "Oh, the garden furniture!" she exclaimed. "I'm really fond of that, myself. Joseph made it all with his own hands. Perhaps you'd like to see it, Albert."

Pond said, "If you're going outside, dear, you'll need a coat in this wind." He pushed back his coffee cup and strode from the room.

After a moment of listening to her husband plod up the stairs, Virgilia rose. "We might as well go ahead, Albert. He'll be along before I catch my death of anything."

They went into the rear garden through the French doors of the billiard room. The warm east wind still moaned, making the pepper trees tremble and causing the banana trees to flap in anguish. Virgilia groped for an outside electric-light switch and clicked it. When nothing happened, she philosophized. "Bulbs will burn out."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Over their heads the rope-hung scaffold swung and hammered twice against the frame wall of the house. Magnum chuckled to excuse his little jump of fright. "Your husband should lower that thing. It's likely to keep you awake tonight."

"No, I'm the world's best sleeper."

They crossed the tiles of the terrace and Magnum admired the iron garden furniture Joseph Pond had himself constructed, what little he could see of it in the dark.

"He likes to bend things," explained Virgilia. "He's converted the old carriage house into a workshop and shares it with the gardener. He and the gardener are like friends." There was a hibiscus bush near the door she opened. She picked the single pale pink blossom and fastened it on top of her brown hair. She grinned, her breath still sweet with manhattans. "I feel paganish. Were those Indian girls really naked?"

"Your father would have disapproved too," said Magnum defensively. She turned on the lights in the former carriage house and he glanced around at objects unfamiliar to him. Work benches, machines he supposed were lathes, rows of hacksaws and bristly files. A great many gardening tools were ranged along the wall next to the door, beneath a shelf of insecticides. The boxes and bottles each displayed its printed skull and crossbones and list of ingredients. The nearest was arsenate of something-or-other.

He never found out exactly what because Virgilia flipped the light off suddenly. She muttered, "I wish *I'd* been born naked. I mean, I suppose I was, of course, but I wish I could live nakedly, not have to hide anything."

"Now really, old girl."

"You've just never lived with an adage, that's all." She hiccuped defiantly. Then she twisted her head hastily toward the house. The upstairs windows were black. "All work and no play. He's been laboriously constructing my happiness for two years. I've got to tell someone!"

"Tell me what?" They were standing together in the doorway of the carriage house, and Magnum abruptly felt romantic, in a benevolent and protective way. He patted her shoulder as he would have petted an animal, provided it was clean and friendly. This particular animal seemed feverish, even through the dusky material of her dress.

She withdrew slightly, musing. Suddenly she told him her secret. "I've seen Cam once or twice lately."

What was the proper reply to that? Good luck? Carry on, dear childhood friend? Magnum never condoned these extramarital doings despite the distinguished line of precedents — Queen Guenevere, for example — but on the other hand he had a lot more respect for Cam Bedsole than for Joseph Pond. And after all she *had* been Mrs. Campbell Bedsole for a while, which should make some sort of difference. Magnum felt excited, in on something. He cleared his throat, preparatory to saying nothing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With a delicious stroke of logic, Virgilia said next, "Well, let's go back to the house and play some high-fidelity recordings. I don't know what can be taking Joseph so long."

They crossed the garden silently. The wind had stopped. Magnum paused beneath a jacaranda tree while Virgilia went ahead. Ostensibly he was searching his pockets for his cigarette holder; actually, he wanted to be alone for a moment to deplore the primitive complications of the Pond household. To think such thoughts while walking beside Virgilia would not have been gallant.

She was on the tiled terrace, swaying toward the open French doors when Magnum heard the scaffolding thud against the house again. Automatically, he peered up through the still branches of the jacaranda.

In that disastrous moment, he couldn't move. He wanted to run to Virgilia, seize her, shelter her body with his own — but all he could do was stand with his mouth open and his hands rigid in his pockets. "Virgilia!" The voice sounded something like his own except that it was too high and cracked unbecomingly with panic.

Her face turned back toward him, whitely. Her eyes were huge and fearful as they rolled upward. From the night above, one end of the painting scaffold plunged to earth. The timbers struck the tile porch with a ringing sound, then the half-suspended platform danced about like a monster marionette. It banged against the wall of the house and smashed at the French doors. In a moment the dance was over and the scaffold curtsied lazily, its sudden wild energy spent.

Albert Magnum ran awkwardly across the terrace. He heard his voice shouting again. Virgilia lay like a bundle of clothes just inside the billiard room, splinters of glass sparkling on her dress.

Pond came into the room from the other direction, his wife's coat draped over his arm. "Virgilia! For God's sake!"

The two men kneeled beside her at the same time. She was uninjured, but her hands fluttered out of control against the carpet. "I fell," she whispered. "I fell. It missed me."

After the doctor had come and gone, the two men stood again in the big living room. With the excitement past, with Virgilia put to sleep upstairs, Magnum shivered. The truth settling in his bones was piercing cold. Virgilia had nearly been killed. Only his shout had saved her, so rudely close had death come. He puckered his forehead in impotence. "But how could it have happened?"

"Fool painters," growled Pond. His fingers angrily shredded the pale flesh of the hibiscus blossom that had fallen from his wife's hair. "They never should have left their gear up there in this wind. I should've had sense enough to lower it myself."

"But the rope was new, brand-new and an inch thick. A break was —"

"It didn't just break," Pond interrupted sharply. "You saw the rope,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Al. It frayed through. Must have been a splinter of iron on the pulley that's been wearing against it. It frayed through until the wind and the weight of those planks snapped the last few strands."

It sounded perfectly plausible as told by Pond's matter-of-fact voice in a fully lighted room. But it was in the dark that Albert Magnum lay awake through the rest of the night, listening to the wind rattle the windows of his bachelor apartment.

He twisted and turned, reliving the evening's adventure many times. Nothing so violent had ever happened to him before. This comes, he thought, of going only where one is invited: tonight he had been invited to an accident. Such a queer notion . . . more likely thought by the wind than by his usually ordered mind. . . . And then suddenly he sat bolt upright in his bed, trembling with excitement. *There had been no wind when the scaffold fell!*

In his first frenzy of imagination he nearly telephoned the police. Luckily, he foresaw the ultimate reaches of that conversation. "Officer, I want to report an attempted murder. Mr. Joseph Pond of Bedsole Drive tried to kill his wife this evening."

Attempted murder *on Bedsole Drive*? Have you any proof, sir?

He had none. Trying to recollect something damning, he rubbed at his mustache with a knuckle but all he produced was an irritated lip. He *knew* it had been intended that he be the corroborative witness to an accidental death, yet what good was his sensitive intuition without facts? At a time like this, he nearly hated facts.

All he could remember were those intangibles which Virgilia's husband might easily explain away. Pond had taken a long time upstairs. He had not turned on any lights visible from the garden. Even the garden light itself had not been working. No — because it might have reflected the knife blade in the second-story window where Pond had waited by the scaffold rope, waiting for his wife to pass below on her return to the house.

But the rope had been frayed, not cut.

That detail baffled Magnum for a while. Then he recalled the files and rasps in Pond's workshop. Of course! Joseph Pond would construct the murder of his wife with tools. Magnum could easily picture those square thick hands moving back and forth over the rope, practicing their craft.

Exhilarated, Magnum slid to the floor and commenced his setting-up exercises although it was not dawn yet, much less his usual hour for rising. But he was faithful to his bedroom calisthenics, and he was now rising to the emergency. Protect Virgilia — that was the watchword. He must get dressed despite the unholy hour, drive to Bedsole Drive, and guard the house where a drugged wife lay at the mercy of her brute husband. He exercised faster than usual, feeling young and intense. He had a Cause. The ringing in his ears as he bent and stretched was like massed trumpets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A ghastly possibility occurred to him just as he finished his counting and grunting. Bedsole Drive, being a wealthy neighborhood, was well patroled by police cars. He might be asked why he was parked there at this time of night. And how did one answer a suspicious policeman? "If you must know, I am protecting a lady."

Why?

"Because her husband is trying to kill her."

Why?

"Because she is having an affair with her ex-husband."

Hey, Ed, listen to this one.

Albert Magnum sank back to his bed with a shudder. Protect Virgilia, certainly, but protect her good name too. He presumed that Virgilia, like any woman, would rather be strangled in her sleep than have her reputation dirtied on the city streets. So he didn't race to her side, after all. He didn't even get dressed until a decent time. He made himself wait, for Virgilia's sake.

After breakfast, about 10 o'clock, he telephoned. To his amazement, Virgilia answered, alive and unslain.

"Are you all right?"

"Certainly, Albert. A bit dopey, perhaps. I'm sorry about the silly way I folded up last night."

"I mean — really all right?"

She actually giggled. "But I just told you! It's very sweet of you to call. I'm always such a bother to people."

His ears began to burn with an asinine feeling. Through the window he could see the clean safe sunlight, and the melodramatic wind had blown itself away and his dark forebodings seemed ridiculous in the bright of day. Despite this treachery, he pressed on. "Virgilia, have any other accidents happened to you recently?"

"Of course not. What do you mean?"

He didn't dare tell her for fear she would laugh at him. He thanked her for last night's dinner, said cautiously to say hello to Cam Bedsole for him, and hung up. His bald spot was damp with the perspiration of embarrassment. He sat in sulky contemplation of the fool he had almost made of himself. The shining armor vanished from his imagination to be replaced by cap and bells . . .

For the next week Albert Magnum plunged resolutely into a series of committee meetings. He managed to keep the Ponds out of his mind except for an occasional twinge of self-resentment.

So it was with a faint vexation on Saturday that he raised his eyes from his luncheon table at the Yacht Club to see Virgilia beaming down at him. "Don't get up," she insisted. "I'm late for an engagement and I can only stop a moment. How are you?"

He rose anyway. "Disappointed, of course." His gallantry was purely automatic although Virgilia did appear as radiant as the bay waters outside. "I see you've recovered completely from your escape."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Escape? Oh, that scaffold business. You know, Albert, we've had a perfect rush of bad luck at our house."

It was good luck that she didn't see the suspicion spring to life in his eyes. She didn't see his appetite disappear. She didn't see his shoulders straighten martially.

"Well," she inquired gaily, "aren't you going to ask me what sort of bad luck?"

"I can't imagine."

"Joseph is ill."

"Oh." After a breath of relief, he added hastily, "That's a shame. What's the trouble?"

"We don't know exactly. The doctor says a touch of ptomaine. He'll be up and about in a day or so, but it certainly has tied me down taking care of him. Why don't you drop by tonight and see him? You know Joseph — confinement makes him restless as a bear."

Virgilia peeked at her wrist watch and said that she really must run. Puzzled, Magnum watched her thread her way among the tables. She slid into a car that had pulled up at the front steps of the Yacht Club. It appeared to be Cam Bedsole at the wheel.

When he called dutifully at the Pond home that evening the maid informed him that Virgilia had not yet returned. Joseph Pond was napping. Albert Magnum waited, finally wandering out into the rear garden. It was seven o'clock and he reflected that Virgilia was being rather flagrant about her private life.

Nevertheless, she didn't deserve to be executed merely for the pursuit of happiness.

The thought was back again, nagging. Magnum found himself standing beneath the jacaranda tree, looking up as he had that night a week before. The upper floor of the old house was dark, as it had been then. But the painting was completed and the scaffold gone. The French doors had been repaired.

He scuffed along the paths irritably, doing battle with his imagination. Why should he attribute evil motives to Joseph Pond? The fall of the scaffold was an unusual accident, but still credible. And this second bit of bad luck had harmed the husband, not the wife. It was melodramatic nonsense.

He hesitated beside the hibiscus bush where Virgilia had plucked the blossom for her hair just before the — yes, the accident. Furtively, Magnum tried the door to the converted carriage house. It swung open invitingly. He stepped inside.

The overhead light shone on the skeletal shapes of Pond's tools and machinery. Nothing was different and Magnum didn't know why he had expected any change. The neat rack of files drew him like a magnet. Blushing with shame, he peered at their corrugated blades. There was no trace of hempen strands caught in any of the tiny spikes.

He had the final proof that he was a fool. He hurried back to the door and turned off the light. Then, slowly, he reached for the switch again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Something *was* different.

It was a very small thing, concerning the shelf of insecticides above the garden tools beside the door. He remembered that a week ago he had scanned the table of ingredients of the first box on that shelf. The table had begun with "arsenate of" something-or-other.

Tonight that box was not there. A spray gun sat in its place. Quickly, Magnum went through the array of boxes and bottles. The label of which he remembered such a scanty fragment was no longer there.

With more delight than apprehension, Albert Magnum now understood everything. Virgilia needed a protector, after all! For it was obvious that Joseph Pond was proceeding with his plans. His first attempt on Virgilia had failed; he was constructing the second more carefully. He was ill because he was experimenting with poison: he was experimenting on himself.

Another accident was going to happen. By some skillfully clumsy error, both Virgilia and Joseph would be poisoned by an arsenic substance. Joseph Pond, being the stronger, would recover after a few days of illness. But Virgilia would die from an identical amount of arsenic, an amount which her husband's acquired tolerance could withstand.

Magnum almost ran back to the house.

Virgilia Pond had just come in. She was stripping off her gloves and spreading a sweet air of manhattans throughout the entry hall. She looked mischievous, glowing, and remote from disaster. "Sorry I'm late, Albert. Have you seen poor Joseph yet?"

I understand he's sleeping."

"We'll wake him."

As they went upstairs Magnum wondered if it would do any good to warn her. No, he decided. All he could tell her were those conjectures to which a wife might listen soberly and then repeat, giggling, to her husband. Charming as she was, Virgilia was not deep. Magnum doubted that she could perceive the barbarity of her husband's nature, the bleak jealousy there that could never forgive, only punish.

Joseph Pond was awake and sitting up. In his woollen robe, his legs under the blankets, he looked more self-conscious than barbaric. Virgilia kissed his drawn cheek lightly. Magnum condemned Pond's bad luck in a convincing manner while in the back of his head he mulled over the problem of how best to rescue Pond's wife. It seemed a pity that the duel had gone out of fashion, as well as the hired assassin.

Pond was saying, "Doc says day after tomorrow. He wants me to take some time off, go camping or something. Don't see how I can, though, with so much to do."

Virgilia patted his hand affectionately. "Really, you should, you know. It may be your working so hard that helped to upset your stomach."

Tummy, Magnum corrected her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mentally. Then it came to him, a strategy suggested by Pond himself. Magnum smiled casually. "Perhaps we could take a run down into Mexico for some surf fishing, Joseph. The weather's balmy enough and open air is the best medicine in the world."

"Fishing, Al?" Pond squinted in disbelief. "I would never have picked you for a sportsman."

"I know a spot below the border, although I haven't been there for twenty years. I'm certain we can borrow some equipment at the club. Lying around on the beach should do you good. And me too, of course."

The scheme appeared perfect to Magnum. It would separate Pond from his wife just when the intended murderer was first recovered and ready to try the second helping of poison. And though Virgilia might not take a warning seriously, Magnum was certain Pond would. He would frame it carefully so that there would be no uncivilized break between Pond and himself. Simply an unmistakable reference to the so-called accident and a clear indication that Albert Magnum was watching and aware should another attempt be made. The man would not dare go ahead if his plans were uncovered beforehand, for Joseph Pond would be in danger if anything befell his wife.

Pond shot a questioning look toward the woman. She said, "Well, if the wide open spaces are the only thing that will keep you from your real estate, I'm for it. I'll miss you, though."

Her husband shrugged after a moment. "I had planned to do a few things around the house, but surf fishing sounds good to me."

It was settled. Magnum collected the largest items of equipment from various club acquaintances and purchased such pieces as were liable to become lost or used up. He had an opportunity to borrow at least one heavy rod from Cam Bedsole but desisted. This was no time for irony. After several telephone consultations with Pond, who was becoming more and more enthusiastic about the outing, he laid in the few provisions required. Pond happened to have two sleeping bags and said he could supply what cooking gear they would need.

They left at dawn on Monday and Magnum was disappointed that Virgilia did not get up to see them off. He had pictured her waving a handkerchief from an upstairs window but, of course, she didn't realize the importance of this adventure.

Fifty miles below the Mexican border, he located the stretch of beach he remembered from his youth. White and clean, the broad belt of sand melted undisturbed into opposite horizons. The pound of surf seemed muffled by the utter loneliness. The dirt road bore no traffic for days at a time and even this faint evidence of man was hidden from the beach itself by soft dunes festooned with creeping plants. The primeval beauty reminded Magnum of the scenery in the mural rejected by his museum.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pond too was exhilarated. He appeared to expand physically as he crunched across the dunes, scarcely bowed beneath three-quarters of the camping paraphernalia. His last traces of pallor vanished under the hot blue sky. He wore no hat but Magnum did, to protect his easily burned bald spot.

Though they talked little while making camp, Magnum discovered a camaraderie rising between himself and his companion. The very stolidity of Virgilia's husband attracted and refreshed him. Yet the same quiet directness of Pond's every move served to stabilize Magnum's determination to set him right. In warning Pond away from murder, Albert Magnum was sure he was making the manful, the civilized gesture. He would be saving, not only Virgilia, but Joseph Pond too.

All through the afternoon they cast and recast their lines until the breakers were growling and frothing dimly against velvet darkness. During the long descent of the sun, neither man relaxed by planting the butt of his rod in the sand. Both Magnum and Pond kept the leather hilts braced against their bodies, playing the drag of the water and the false strikes of kelp with a sort of mutual exaltation. Magnum suspected he would be stiff in the morning but he couldn't resist the fervor of the battle.

At last, Pond said, "Guess we better leave some for tomorrow," and they trudged back to their camp. Pond had caught three perch and a croaker. Magnum's catch was one fish, a corbina weighing about six pounds, but it was more of a prize than his companion's four. He felt bold and successful. He stored the spare fish in the trunk cooler in the car while Pond began preparing the evening meal.

When Magnum returned to the cooking-hole where the fire blazed, Pond was boiling coffee in a battered can and cursing his own forgetfulness in leaving the coffee pot behind. They dined in silent grandeur on the flaky crispness of corbina and draughts of the bitter coffee. They squatted like Indians on opposite sides of the fire-pit while the flames sank lower and the circle of night closed in.

When he began thinking longingly of the sleeping bags, Magnum recalled with a start his reason for this expedition. A Crusader letting the Saracens slip from his mind could not have been more shocked. Magnum opened the subject with more abruptness that he intended. "It's hard to believe that we give up all this peace simply to crowd ourselves into cities. I often wonder, do we gain anything worthwhile? Only jealousy and disease and so on."

For a despairing instant he feared that Joseph Pond had fallen asleep. Then the stony bulk across the way stirred and scratched itself. "Well, Al, property came first. The first towns were single families. The main reason for family is still to protect property." With a lazy grunt, Pond

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stopped speaking and left Magnum without a single idea for another foray.

Luckily, after a long pause, Pond added dreamily, "I'd like to live on a ranch, myself. But Virgilia can't be talked into selling that old barn on Bedsole Drive. She's strong on memories, on living in the past. You know."

Magnum knew. He also deplored Pond's disrespect for the old Skillet house, but it did give him an opening. "Then you'll admit that what are annoyances in town fade away out here in the open. It's the constant, grating proximity that gives rise to jealousy and the unnatural deaths that go with it."

"What kinds of death aren't natural?"

"Oh, war, for example." Magnum drained his coffee cup with trembling hands before delivering his *coup de grâce*. "And murder, if you want to include the petty things."

"I never saw a man who called his own death a petty thing."

"I meant that most motives for murder are pretty slight, compared to the value the murderer places on his own life." Breathlessly, Magnum watched the flickering face across the fire.

After some consideration, Pond snorted. "What right-thinking murderer is going to imagine his own life ending? No one ever applies that notion to himself."

"I know a man who did." Again Magnum waited for Pond to show an avid interest and was disappointed. "I know a man who intended to kill."

"Oh?" Pond was engrossed in gingerly plucking the coffee can off the coals and dividing the remainder of its contents between their two cups. Magnum, once more dismayed by doubt, gulped at it for strength. Surely, he couldn't have made a mistake! But never had he seen a face as magnificently unconcerned as Pond's. At his last pronouncement, Magnum had expected to observe the twitching mouth, the sliding eye of a cornered criminal. Yet Pond merely inquired, "Do I know him?"

"I don't think you'd recognize him."

"You say he didn't go through with it?"

"No."

"Then he couldn't have had his mind much set on it."

"Oh, yes, he did! He had a frank, straightforward mind, and murder was its obsessing idea for a time. But because he had that type of mind, he was reasoned out of it. A simple use of civilized logic. You see, a third person came to the rescue — a disinterested unselfish person who was a friend of both the intended murderer and the intended victim."

"But how did this third person catch on, Al?"

"Well, the murderer was such a practical fellow that he rehearsed his crime beforehand. Our third person, thank Heaven, was astute and alert. He saw through the murderer's plan."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pond sat very still, thinking. At last, he shook his head bullishly. "Much as I've come to like you, Al, sometimes you don't make good sense. This business of talking a murderer out of his murder — what possible argument could be used?"

Magnum smiled with relief. Pond not only understood him, he was also trying hard to comprehend his viewpoint. So far disarmed, Pond would succumb, Magnum knew. It was just a pity that Virgilia could never be told about his triumph in her behalf. However, his own accolade would have to suffice. He said, "As I mentioned, Joseph, it's a matter of simple logic. The murderer was invited to weigh his own life against the small satisfaction he'd gain from killing his wife."

Magnum smiled but Joseph Pond laughed. It was a jolly roar that broke over the beach in waves of merriment. Magnum would have joined in if Pond hadn't held up his hand for silence. "Al, excuse me! That was a sweet lesson in logic but what if you had made a mistake? What if nothing you said applied to the case at hand?"

"But how could that be?"

"Excuse me," gasped Pond, still choking with amusement, "and listen.

"I also know a man who decided to kill. But he wasn't anything like your nitwit friend. No, when he heard his wife was playing around, he very logically set out to protect his property. Protect it, Al — not destroy it. He told his wife to bring her friends around to the house. He knew darn well who she'd invite right off. Women are pretty obvious."

He smiled.

"This man specialized in accidents, Al, but the first time he tried the darkness fooled him. The darkness made him mistake a flower in his wife's hair for his victim's bald spot. But he got her lover the second time around. It seems they went camping in a lonely place and the coffee was boiled in a can which formerly contained a very potent insecticide. Only the husband recovered from . . ."

Albert Magnum was no longer listening. He had rolled face downward on the sand with the first clawing agony in his belly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Eleventh

$7,500 SHORT STORY CONTEST

(again with the cooperation of Little, Brown & Co., of Boston)

First Prize $1500

SPECIAL AWARD OF MERIT, $1000

Nine Second Prizes, $500 each **Best "First" Story, $500**

FOR the eleventh consecutive year EQMM offers big cash prizes for top-flight original stories of detection or crime. As usual, awards will be made solely on the basis of merit—that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Mercury Publications, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from old-timers as well as beginners—a special prize of $500 is offered for the best "first" story. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

Complete rules may be obtained by writing to Contest Editor, EQMM, 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y.

Last year EQMM awarded $12,000 in prizes for the 10th Annual Short Story Contest. Awards in the series of Short Story Contests now total more than $125,000.

» ***You don't need to buy Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine to enter the contest. But if you want it, and should find your newsdealer sold out, use this convenient coupon.***

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Q-July-5
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Enter my subscription for one year (12 issues).

☐ I enclose $4. ☐ Please bill me.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yes! You Get $15 Worth of New Mysteries At Once—FREE!

—Continued from Back Cover

WHAT a magnificent FEAST of reading for dyed-in-the-wool mystery fans! You get all six of these mystery triumphs of Erle Stanley Gardner, the "Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"! Each is a *full size, full length* book, absolutely complete. A $15.00 value—but yours FREE on this sensational offer!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club—the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview", which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books—only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail coupon promptly, and we will send you at once—FREE—the six complete Perry Mason mystery thrillers, described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L. I., New York

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE

SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD

44

Walter J. Black, President **UC**

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length Perry Mason mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. *(Books shipped in U. S. A. only.)*

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Zone No.

Erle Stanley Gardner
THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD
THE CASE OF THE Runaway Corpse
THE CASE OF THE Fugitive Nurse
the case of the
THE CASE OF THE Grinning Gorilla
THE CASE OF THE Green-Eyed Sister

FREE to MYSTERY FANS

As a New Membership Gift

ALL 6

OF THESE THRILLING **PERRY MASON** HITS BY

ERLE STANLEY **GARDNER**

THE NO. 1 MYSTERY WRITER

All Six PERRY MASON Hits FREE on this Sensational Offer!

① THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD

Mason's client is accused of stealing $40,000 in jewels. Then they accuse her of *MURDER!* Perry must save her from the chair—though he suspects she may be GUILTY!

② THE CASE OF THE RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband Ed. All Perry finds is — *blank* paper! The police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

③ THE CASE OF THE FUGITIVE NURSE

Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Then a blonde *slams the safe shut.* Not sinister . . . *except* that the *tenant* had been MURDERED!

④ THE CASE OF THE GREEN-EYED SISTER

Grogan, a blackmailer, wants $20,000 for a piece of evidence against Fritch. Then Fritch is found DEAD! Grogan has an alibi—but not Mason!

⑤ THE CASE OF THE HESITANT HOSTESS

The *first* woman says she saw Perry's client at *the scene of the crime.* The *second* should not have appeared —but did. The *third* —Perry's star witness — *disappeared completely!*

⑥ THE CASE OF THE GRINNING GORILLA

Mason may never LIVE to solve this case! He faces a monstrous gorilla—*a long carving knife in its hairy hand!*

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
Roslyn, N.Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

ROSLYN, L. I.

NEW YORK

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEE OTHER SID